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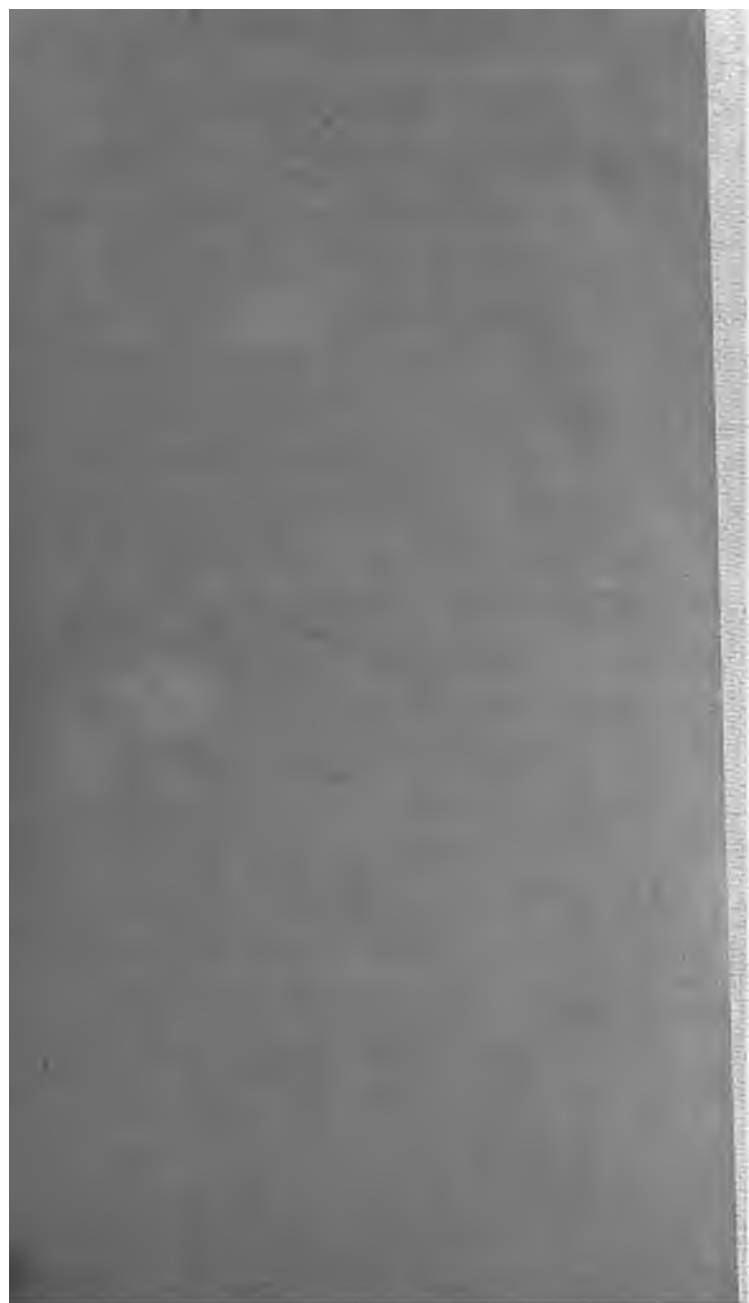
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Little boy



17

Lincoln

NIRN

**THE
OFFICIAL CHAPERON**

By Natalie Sumner Lincoln

The Official Chaperone

C. O. D.

The Man Inside

The Lost Despatch

The Trevor Case

D. APPLETON & COMPANY, NEW YORK

187A

THE OFFICIAL CHAPERON

BY
NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN
AUTHOR OF "C. O. D.," "THE TREVOR CASE," ETC.

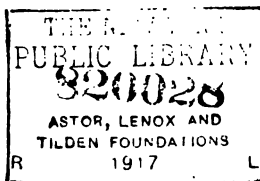


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Marjorie Langdon

TO MY BROTHER
GEORGE GOULD LINCOLN

*"We twa hae run about the braes,
And pu'd the gowans fine;
But we've wandered mony a weary foot
Sin auld lang syne."*

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CHAPTER I

AN ILL WIND

WASHINGTON, Washington; all off for Washington!" The porter's stentorian call echoed through the Pullman sleeper.

"This way out."

A second more and the aisle was filled with sleepy passengers who strove to push past each other with the impatient rudeness which characterizes the average American traveler. The last to leave the car was a tall man, whose leisurely movements left him a prey to a hovering porter, and he surrendered his suit-case to the obsequious darky, after first inquiring the way to the baggage room.

"Go ahead and engage a taxi for me," he directed, following his guide across the imposing concourse and into the waiting-room.

"Yessir." The porter touched his cap respectfully; at one glance he had appraised the traveler's well-groomed appearance, and his palm itched for the anticipated tip. "But you'd better hurry, suh;

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I kain't hol' a cab long, suh, an' dey's mighty scarce at dis time ob de mawnin,' suh."

"All right." The traveler quickened his steps, corralled a half awake baggage clerk, gave his instructions, and sought the southern entrance of the station without further waste of time.

"Heah's yo' cab, suh," called the porter. The information was somewhat superfluous, for only one taxi stood at the curb, the rest having been requisitioned by other passengers. "Thank yo', suh," added the porter, as his fingers closed over a half dollar; his intuition had not been wrong. "Where to, suh?"

His question remained unanswered, for the traveler shouldered him aside, and gave his directions to the chauffeur in so low a tone that they were not overheard, then entered the cab and settled himself comfortably on the roomy seat. Half dozing he took no notice of the taxi's progress up Massachusetts Avenue to Sheridan Circle, and was only aroused from his nap by the abrupt stopping of the vehicle before a white marble residence of imposing size. He started to leave the taxi, then drew back.

"Lord!" he grumbled, inspecting the drawn blinds and closed vestibule door. "I forgot I'm still south of Mason and Dixon's line; everybody's asleep."

"Want to be driven around a bit, sir?" questioned the chauffeur.

"I do not," dryly, glancing askance at the register. He pulled out his watch and scanned the dial. "Six-fifteen. Any Turkish Baths near here?"

AN ILL WIND

"The Riggs' Bath is the best, sir; get you there in a few minutes."

"Very well," and with a resigned sigh, the traveler leaned back and studied his surroundings with interest as the taxi passed down the quiet thoroughfares. On approaching the business section of the city there were more signs of life, and in crossing a street the taxi was held up by a number of heavy drays.

In the pause that followed the traveler casually inspected the side of a red brick basement house whose entrance fronted on the other street. The windows of what appeared to be a library on the second floor were open, letting in the balmy air which accompanies Indian Summer in the Capital City, and the traveler saw a colored servant dusting the room. His feather duster, wielded with unusual vigor, struck against some papers lying on a desk by the window, and the top-most sheet sailed out. The wind carried it to the gutter where a small stream of water from the recently flushed street swept it along to the sewer opening, where it poised for a moment on the brink, then disappeared into the dark depths beneath. The servant, leaning half out of the window, breathlessly watched the paper's progress with eyes and mouth wide open, and his ludicrously agonized expression drew a faint chuckle from the traveler as his taxi started down the street.

Some time later the traveler, refreshed by his bath, lay back in the luxuriously furnished dormitory of

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the Riggs' Turkish Bath and puffed contentedly at his cigar. He paid no attention to three be-sheeted men who were talking together as they lounged at one end of the room.

"Who was the pretty girl you were dancing with yesterday afternoon at the Shoreham, Jimmie?" questioned the eldest of the three men.

"Janet Fordyce." Jimmie Painter's voice was of the carrying kind, and as the name reached his ears the traveler sat bolt upright, but the men, engrossed in their conversation, failed to observe his attention. "A winner, isn't she, Logan?" continued Jimmie complacently.

"Yes, trust you to pick 'em," grumbled Logan, "and to cultivate them afterwards, too. Who is she?"

"Daughter of Calderon Fordyce, the Western importer of——"

"Opium—tainted money," jeered his companion.

"What difference? Its buying qualities make it refined gold."

"You weren't the only one bowled over by the Fordyce girl," remarked the youngest member of the group. "She made quite an impression on Chichester Barnard."

"Nothing doing there, Cooper!" exclaimed Jimmie Painter skeptically. "Chichester's not the kind to be attracted by a débutante; besides, he's too gone on Marjorie Langdon."

"Not so gone he doesn't keep his weather eye out," retorted Joe Calhoun-Cooper. "As far as Miss

AN ILL WIND

Langdon's concerned it's attention without intention. She's as poor as Job's turkey."

"I hear she's crazy about Chichester," volunteered Logan. "By Jove! if I was first favorite, I'd marry Miss Langdon and risk poverty."

"Too Utopian," commented Joe. "Better choose a golden 'Bud'—they are the only kind worth plucking in Washington."

"I agree with you," put in Jimmie Painter. "Do you suppose old Calderon Fordyce will come across with the money bags when his daughter marries?"

"I'm told he's rolling in wealth," acknowledged Joe. "But for all that, you'd better go slow, Jimmie; there's some kink in the family."

"What do you mean?"

"An intimate friend said——" Joe never finished the sentence, for an iron hand jerked him to his feet and swung him about face.

"I have been an unwilling listener to your conversation," said the traveler slowly, addressing the astounded men, and not loosening his hold on Joe. "You can congratulate yourselves that you live in Washington; such discussion of women would not be tolerated elsewhere. I give you fair warning, each and all of you, if you mention Miss Fordyce's name in future conversations I will break every bone in your bodies."

It was no idle threat; the sheet had slipped from the traveler's broad shoulders, disclosing the brawn and build of an athlete.

"You understand me," he added, his level glance

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seeking Joe's, and his vice-like grip tightened until the bones cracked.

"Yes, d-mn you!" muttered Joe, through clenched teeth. "Let go."

"Who the —— are you?" gasped Jimmie, hastily retreating beyond the traveler's reach.

"Miss Fordyce's brother—Duncan Fordyce," was the calm reply, and Joe, released suddenly, collapsed on his couch.

CHAPTER II

MISSING

YOU are, then, absolutely positive that Miss Langdon called up Mr. Barnard the last thing before leaving this room yesterday afternoon?" questioned Rear Admiral Lawrence, with such quiet persistence that pretty Nurse Allen opened her eyes in wonder.

"I cannot swear that it was the last thing Miss Langdon did before leaving here," she answered, somewhat dryly. "I only know I found her at the telephone when I came in to ring up Dr. McLane, and I overheard her address the person she was speaking to over the wire as 'Chichester,' and tell him it was important that she see him."

"Did Miss Langdon appear agitated?"

Nurse Allen shook her head. "Her manner seemed to be the same as usual; but she looked pale and tired."

"Was Miss Langdon holding this photograph in her hand?" As he spoke the Admiral fumbled among the papers on his desk and knocked to the floor the picture he was seeking. Muttering an ejaculation, he stooped to get it, but Nurse Allen was before him and, her color heightened by her

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hasty exertion, picked up the photograph. She barely glanced at the kodak likeness of Chichester Barnard, but she read the message scrawled across the bottom: "Love's young dream—à la bonne heure! C. B.," before replacing the photograph on the desk.

"It may have been in Miss Langdon's hand," she said indifferently. "I was only here for a second, as Sam brought me word that Dr. McLane had come and I hurried back to Mrs. Lawrence. I really can give you no information about the photograph."

"Oh, no matter; I found it lying by the telephone. I suppose——" the Admiral broke off abstractedly and drummed with nervous fingers on the back of the chair against which he was leaning. In the pause Nurse Allen permitted her eyes to wander downward to the photograph lying face upward near her, and a ghost of a smile touched her mobile lips. Clever as she was in her chosen profession, she was not, in this instance, a discriminating observer, and utterly failed to connect the scrawled message on the photograph with the faint mockery traceable in Chichester Barnard's expressive eyes. The snap-shot was a good likeness, and Barnard's fine physique and handsome features were reproduced without flattery.

"Can you tell me how long Miss Langdon remained alone in this room?" asked Admiral Lawrence suddenly arousing himself.

"No, sir, I have no idea. I did not come here again, until you sent for me this morning."

The Admiral stepped over to the window and

raised the Holland shade until the room was flooded with sunlight.

"I won't detain you longer," he announced, turning back to the young nurse. "You will oblige me greatly by making no mention of our conversation."

"Certainly, sir." Nurse Allen turned a mystified gaze on her employer as she walked toward the door. "I'll be in my room if you want me. The day nurse is with Mrs. Lawrence now."

The Admiral heaved an impatient sigh as the door closed behind her, and seating himself at his desk turned his attention to several sheets of manuscript, but they failed to hold his interest. A soft knock at the library door interrupted him, and he looked up with an air of relief.

"Come in," he called. "Oh, good morning, Marjorie," as a girl appeared in the doorway. "Aren't you late this morning?"

"I was detained," explained Marjorie Langdon, glancing in some embarrassment at the Admiral; she had not expected to find him at his desk. "How is Mrs. Lawrence?"

"About the same," a deep sigh accompanied the words. "Dr. McLane holds out little hope of her recovery. She may live a month, or——" his gesture of despair completed the sentence.

"I am grieved to hear it," Marjorie looked at the Admiral much distressed. "Is there anything I can do for Mrs. Lawrence?"

"Thank you, I am afraid not," he replied, carefully turning his back to the light. He did not wish

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even his confidential secretary to read the anxiety and sorrow written so plainly on his haggard face. His vigils in the sick-room were breaking down his usually rigid self-control. "Is there any mail for me?"

"Yes, sir; I found it on the hall table. There are a number of notes inquiring about your wife, and a letter from your publisher." Marjorie left her typewriter desk and approached the Admiral, letters in hand. "Do you wish to dictate the answers?"

"Not just now." The Admiral took the neatly assorted letters from her and without examining their contents, tossed them down on his flat-top desk. "There is a matter of importance"—he stopped and cleared his throat—"you recall typewriting a codicil to my wife's will?"

"Perfectly," put in Marjorie, as the Admiral paused again.

"You made a carbon copy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Because your lawyer, Mr. Alvord, thought that Mrs. Lawrence, through weakness, might spoil her signature on the first sheet, and he wished to have a second copy at hand if it should be needed."

"Do you recall what transpired after the signing of the codicil?"

"Very distinctly," replied Marjorie, her surprise at the continued questioning showing in her manner. "After the witnesses signed the document, Mr. Alvord returned here to collect his papers. Just as

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he was leaving you came in and asked him to leave the signed codicil."

"Quite right," broke in the Admiral. "Mrs. Lawrence wished it left here, in order to read it again when she felt stronger. Before returning to my wife, I requested you to put the codicil in my safe . . ."

"I carried out your instructions," declared Marjorie, her heart beating faster with a nameless dread.

"By placing the *unsigned* carbon copy of the codicil in the safe—" an ironical smile twisted the Admiral's lips. "You improved on my instructions."

Marjorie's lovely hazel-gray eyes widened in horror as the meaning of his words dawned upon her.

"You are entirely mistaken," she protested vehemently. "I put the codicil Mr. Alvord gave me in the safe—upon my word of honor!"

"I found the unsigned copy there an hour ago," replied the Admiral steadily.

"The other must be there, too," Marjorie moved impetuously toward the small safe which was partly hidden from sight by a revolving bookcase. "Let me look——"

"It is not necessary." Marjorie wheeled about and her face crimsoned at the curtness of his tone. "I have just searched the entire contents of the safe—the signed codicil is not there."

"You must be wrong," gasped Marjorie. "Mr. Alvord had the carbon copy; how could I put it in the safe?"

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"I have just telephoned Alvord," said the Admiral quickly. "He declares he left the carbon copy on my desk."

There was a ghastly pause. The Admiral glanced keenly at his silent companion, and his eyes lighted in reluctant admiration of her beauty. Unconscious of his scrutiny, Marjorie studied the pattern of the rug with unseeing eyes, striving to collect her confused thoughts.

"Are you engaged to Chichester Barnard?" inquired the Admiral, abruptly.

The point blank question drove every vestige of color from Marjorie's cheeks. Slowly she turned and regarded the Admiral from head to foot.

"You have no right to ask that question," she said icily.

"That is a matter of opinion," retorted the Admiral heatedly. "I think circumstances have given me that right. My wife, in this codicil, revoked her bequest to her nephew, Chichester Barnard"—he stopped impressively. "Alvord took down my wife's instructions, then came here and, without my knowledge, had you typewrite the codicil. The night nurse, Miss Allen, tells me that after Alvord's departure she came in here to use the telephone, and you were talking to Chichester. Is that true?"

"Yes, I rang him up," defiantly. "I have done the same in the past."

The Admiral sighed. "Miss Allen informed me that she overheard you tell Chichester that you must see him at once on a matter of importance." He

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paused, waiting for some comment, but Marjorie stood as if turned to stone, and he continued more gently, "Come, Marjorie, own up that a mistaken, loyal impulse to aid and protect a—lover"—Marjorie shivered and her cold fingers plucked nervously at her gown—"prompted you to hold back the signed codicil. I will forget the matter if you will return the document to me."

"But I haven't the codicil," she protested.

"You have destroyed it?" leaning intently toward her.

"No. I have already told you I placed the paper in the safe."

The Admiral's face hardened. "You still stick to——"

"The truth," proudly. "I have been your amenuensis for nearly two years; in that time have I ever lied to you?"

"No."

"Then you must believe my word now."

Without replying the Admiral wheeled about in his swivel chair and looked through the window at the street below. Marjorie could read nothing from the side view of his face, and her heart sank. Suddenly he swung back and confronted her again.

"I think it would be as well if you resigned," he said, coldly.

The room swam before Marjorie; she felt half suffocated, then hot anger came to her rescue, and she pulled herself together.

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"You are treating me with shameful injustice," she began, her eyes glowing with indignation.

"On the contrary, I am most lenient," retorted the Admiral. "You have been guilty of a criminal act——"

"I deny it absolutely," exclaimed Marjorie passionately. "You have no grounds for such an accusation."

"You had both incentive and opportunity to steal that signed codicil," declared the Admiral, paying scant attention to her denial. "Chichester Barnard stands to lose a hundred thousand dollars by that codicil; lack of funds prevents him from marrying a poor girl"—Marjorie winced visibly and bit her lips to hide their trembling. "You were the last person to leave this room yesterday afternoon; I never came in here again until this morning. You had the signed codicil in your possession, you knew the combination of the safe; the carbon copy was lying on this desk—the substitution was easy!"

"Supposing your preposterous charge is true," said Marjorie slowly. "What good could I hope to accomplish by such a substitution?"

"After the excitement of signing the codicil, my wife suffered a relapse, and was not expected to live through the night. If she dies"—the Admiral shaded his eyes, which had grown moist, with his hand—"only the unsigned codicil is here; therefore Chichester Barnard, by the terms of her will, will inherit her bequest. However, my wife still lives, and when she regains consciousness I shall have her

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sign this carbon copy," opening his desk drawer and removing a folded paper. "After all, you were only partially successful."

"To succeed, one must first undertake," retorted Marjorie. "Tell me, please, if you thought I would betray your trust, why did you give me the codicil to place in the safe?"

"First, because I was not aware you knew the contents of the paper; secondly, I never knew there was a carbon copy; thirdly, my wife's precarious condition effectually put out of my mind your infatuation for Chichester Barnard."

"My infatuation?" echoed Marjorie, a slow, painful blush creeping up her white cheeks. "You are hardly complimentary, Admiral."

"Put it any way you wish," he replied wearily. "I must ask you to hurry and gather your belongings, Miss Langdon, for I must return to my wife."

"I shan't be a minute." Stung by his tone, Marjorie hurried to her desk and rapidly put the drawers in order. As she covered the typewriter she paused and gazed about the pleasant, sunlit room through tear-dimmed eyes. She had spent many happy hours there, for both Admiral and Mrs. Lawrence had done much to make her comfortable, and the work had been interesting and comparatively easy. What had induced the Admiral to credit so monstrous a charge against her? She stiffened with indignation, and picking up the key of her desk, walked over to him. He looked up at her approach, and the full light from the window betrayed the increasing lines

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and wrinkles about his mouth and eyes. His hair had whitened, and his usually ruddy cheeks were pale.

"Here is the key of my desk," she said, laying it down before him. "The carbon copy of your book is in the right-hand drawer, and your official and business correspondence fills the other drawers. Will you please examine them before I leave."

He rose in silence and went swiftly through the contents of the typewriter desk. "Everything is correct," he acknowledged, noting with inward approval the neat and orderly arrangement of his correspondence.

"Then I will leave; my hat and coat are downstairs," and with a formal bow Marjorie turned toward the door.

"One moment;" the Admiral stepped back to his own desk. "You forget your check; I have made it out for one month in advance, in lieu of notice."

Mechanically Marjorie's fingers closed over the slip of paper extended to her; then she drew her slender, graceful figure erect.

"I am a girl, alone in the world," she said clearly. "I have had to take your insults today, but thank God, I can refuse to take your money."

The torn check fell in a tiny shower at the Admiral's feet as the hall door banged to behind her vanishing figure.

The seconds had slipped into minutes before the Admiral moved; then he dropped into his desk chair.

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"What does she see in Chichester?" he muttered.
"What is there about that scoundrel which attracts women? Where's that photograph?"

But his search was unavailing; the photograph had disappeared.

CHAPTER III

QUESTIONS AND QUERIES

MARJORIE LANGDON contemplated her small wardrobe as it lay spread out before her on the bed, and then gazed at the pass-book open in her hand. She saw the slender balance remaining to her credit at the bank through diminishing glasses, and despair tugged at her heart-strings.

"The way of the bread-winner is hard," she paraphrased bitterly. "I don't wonder there are so many transgressors in the world. Bless my soul, Minerva, what do you want?"

The colored woman, who had entered the bedroom unnoticed a second before, actually jumped at the sharpness of Marjorie's usually tranquil voice.

"'Scuse me, miss; but I knocked an' knocked at de do' 'till I was plum' tired. My, ain't dem pretty?" catching a glimpse of the dresses on the bed. "Is ye fixin' ter go ter a party?"

"Not exactly," wearily. "I am sorry I kept you waiting, but I was—thinking."

"Yes, miss; I heard yo' a talkin' ter yo'self, an' calculated yo' didn't hyar me." Minerva backed toward the door. "Lunch am ready."

"Is it time?" exclaimed Marjorie, glancing in sur-

QUESTIONS AND QUERIES

prise at her wrist-watch, whose hands pointed to three minutes past one. "I'll be right down; tell Madame Yvonett not to wait for me."

"Marse Tom's hyar," volunteered Minerva, as she disappeared over the threshold, closing the door behind her.

Left to herself, Marjorie bathed her face, the cool water bringing some relief to her throbbing temples, then after rearranging her hair, she paused a moment and anxiously regarded her reflection in the mirror. Except for an increased pallor, her expression gave no indication of the shock the stormy interview with Admiral Lawrence had given her. Feverishly pinching her cheeks in hopes of restoring her customary color, and without stopping to replace her gowns in the closet, she left the room and ran downstairs.

Six years previous Marjorie's father, John Langdon, had died a bankrupt, and his worldly possessions had gone under the hammer to meet the demands of his creditors. His widow, never very strong, had soon succumbed to the unequal struggle for existence that confronted her, and after the death of her mother, Marjorie had made her home with her great-aunt, Madame Yvonett, who owned a small house on Thirteenth Street, opposite Franklin Square. She insisted on contributing her share to the household expenses, for Madame Yvonett had trusted her business affairs to her nephew's management, and when John Langdon failed, most of her property had gone in the general smash, and she

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eked out her curtailed income by taking paying guests.

Madame Yvonett, a Philadelphian by birth, belonged to a distinguished Quaker family, and at the age of sixteen had been, as the quaint term runs, "read out of meeting for marrying one of the world's people." Henri Yvonett had wooed and won the beautiful Quakeress when attached to the French Legation, as it was then, and afterwards he was promoted to other diplomatic posts. On his death some eighteen years before, Madame Yvonett had made Washington her home, and her house became one of the centers of fashionable life.

Her financial difficulties came when she was approaching three-score years and ten, but only Marjorie divined the pang that her changed fortunes cost the beautiful Quaker dame, for she never discussed her troubles in public. She faced adversity with quiet fortitude; gave up her handsome residence on Scott Circle, dismissed her staff of servants, and moved into the Thirteenth Street house, which had been one of her investments in happier days.

Marjorie hastened into the dining-room and found her great-aunt in animated conversation with her cousin, Captain Thomas Nichols, of the —th Field Artillery, who rose at her entrance.

"How are you, Madge?" he exclaimed, extending both hands in greeting.

"Very well, and very glad to see you," she replied cordially. "Aunt Yvonett, I am sorry to be late, do excuse me."

QUESTIONS AND QUERIES

"Thee is only a few minutes behind time, and Thomas has kept me very agreeably entertained," answered the Quakeress. She had always retained her "plain speech," and in her dress, the soft grays and browns of the Friends. Silvery curls framed a face of the eighteenth-century type, and, with arms, still rounded and white, showing below her elbow sleeves, with the folds of a white fichu across her breast, she made a novel and lovely picture as she sat at the head of the table. "Will thee have some tea?" she asked.

"If you please." Marjorie slipped into a seat opposite her aunt. "What brings you over from Fort Myer, Tom?"

"Had to go to the War Department. Try some of these beaten biscuit, Madge, Minerva has excelled herself," smiling gaily at the colored woman. "I thought Cousin Yvonett would take pity on me and give me a bite."

"I am always pleased to see thee, Thomas," answered Madame Yvonett. "But if thee only wants a bite, thee should join the 'Hunger Club.'"

"The 'Hunger Club'?" echoed Tom. "It doesn't sound encouraging; is it anything like the 'starvation parties' in Richmond before that city surrendered to Grant?"

"Only alike in that they both leave much to be desired," smiled Madame Yvonett. "The club was organized two weeks ago by eleven wealthy women; the twelfth place being left for an invited guest. A prize will be awarded at the end of the season to

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the hostess who has given the most appetizing luncheon for the least money."

"How are they going to know how much each luncheon costs?"

"The hostess is required to write the price of every course on the back of the place cards. The object of the club is to encourage simplified living in fashionable circles," she went on to explain. "I was the invited guest at the luncheon yesterday."

"Did you get anything to eat?" inquired Tom.

"She ate something before she went," supplemented Marjorie mischievously.

"Only some biscuits and a glass of sherry," protested Madame Yvonett. "Thee sees, Thomas, I do not like to have my digestion upset, and I took precautions; a cold water luncheon never agrees with me."

"Didn't they give you anything solid to eat?"

"Yes; the luncheon, such as there was of it, was very nice. But the discussion of the food and its price quite destroyed my appetite."

"You prefer a soupçon of gossip to season a delicacy," teased Tom. "I bet you christened it the 'Hunger Club.'"

"Your invitation read 'to meet the Economy Luncheon Club,'" Marjorie reminded her aunt.

Madame Yvonett smiled as she helped herself to some butter. "Did thee not return earlier than usual from the Lawrences', Marjorie?" she asked.

Involuntarily Marjorie stiffened; she had dreaded the question. She dared not tell her aunt of Admiral

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Lawrence's accusation. Their physician had warned her that Madame Yvonett must not be excited, or she would bring on one of her heart attacks. The last seizure two months before had been most severe, Marjorie having found her aunt lying unconscious on the floor of her bedroom. Knowing Madame Yvonett's indomitable spirit she realized that nothing, save perhaps physical weakness, would prevent her from seeing Admiral Lawrence and demanding an instant retraction of his charge against her niece. Such scenes would undoubtedly bring on a return of her heart trouble, perhaps with fatal results. Marjorie turned cold at the thought; Madame Yvonett was very dear to her. But what excuse could she give for her dismissal except the truth?

"I hear Mrs. Lawrence is not expected to live," said Tom, breaking the slight pause.

"Who told you that?" demanded Marjorie.

"Chichester Barnard; I met him on my way here. By the way, he wished me to tell you he would not be able to go to Mrs. Marsh's tea with you this afternoon on account of a business engagement," he glanced curiously at her, but Marjorie was occupied in making bread pellets and it was several seconds before she spoke.

"Mrs. Lawrence is critically ill. The Admiral is constantly at her bedside, and he cannot attend to his book, so Aunt Yvonett," looking gravely at her, "my services are not required."

"I am glad that thee is to have a vacation," replied the Quakeress; "but I am distressed to hear

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that Mrs. Lawrence is worse; she is a lovely woman, her husband can ill spare her."

"You must come over and spend the day at my quarters, Consin Yvonett, now that Madge has time at her disposal," broke in Tom. "The drills are being held every Friday afternoon, and I know you enjoy them."

"Thee is most kind, and if the weather permits we will come. Who was thy friend who came to the door with thee this morning, Thomas?"

"Joe Cooper. I didn't bring him in, Cousin Yvonett, because, to be frank, I don't fancy the fellow."

"I thought he was quite nice," announced Marjorie, arousing from her abstraction. "He is certainly most obliging."

"Boot-licking," with scornful emphasis.

"That's hardly fair," exclaimed Marjorie. "He had nothing to gain by being nice to me, and secondly, his father, J. Calhoun-Cooper, is a representative in Congress, and I am told, is very wealthy."

"He has money," acknowledged Tom grudgingly, "and that's about all. Joe's grandfather started his fortune digging ditches in Philadelphia."

"I know now of whom thee speaks," interposed Madame Yvonett. "But thee is mistaken; he didn't dig ditches, he paved streets. Brother Hugh helped John Cooper to get his start in life; at one time he slept in our barn chamber."

"I'd like Joe to hear that," chuckled Tom. "He and I were at Lawrenceville together, and I had enough of his purse-pride there. The Calhoun-

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Coopers—don't forget the hyphen, Cousin Yvonett—have leased your old house on Scott Circle."

Marjorie, her observation quickened by the deep love and veneration in which she held her aunt, detected the shadow which crossed the benign old face and the dimming of the bright eyes as memories of other days crowded upon the Quakeress, and she swiftly changed the subject.

"Cousin Rebekah Graves is coming this afternoon to spend the winter with us," she volunteered. "What day can we bring her to Fort Myer, Tom?"

"Come this Friday——" he stopped speaking as Minerva appeared from the hall and approached Marjorie.

"Hyar's a note done come fo' yo', Miss Marjorie, and de chuffer's waitin' fo' an answer."

Marjorie scanned the fine, precise writing; it was not a hand she recognized, and handwriting to her was like a photograph. Excusing herself, she tore open the envelope and perused the note.

"Listen to this, Aunt Yvonett," she began and read aloud:

"DEAR MISS LANGDON:

Sheridan Circle.

I had expected to make your acquaintance before this date, but moving into my new home has occupied all my time. Can you come and take tea with me this afternoon at five o'clock? I am an old school friend of your mother's, and as such I hope you will overlook the informality of my invitation. Trusting that I shall see you later, believe me,

Sincerely yours,

Wednesday.

FLORA FORDYCE."

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"It must be Janet Fordyce's mother," added Marjorie. "They have bought the Martin house. Who was Mrs. Calderon Fordyce before her marriage, Aunt Yvonett?"

Madame Yvonett shook her head. "I cannot tell thee. I was abroad when thy mother was a school-girl, and knew none of her classmates. Will thee accept Mrs. Fordyce's invitation?"

"Of course. Cousin Rebekah's train arrives at three-thirty; I will have plenty of time to meet her and bring her here first. I must answer Mrs. Fordyce's note," and pushing back her chair she hastened into the parlor which was fitted up as a living-room. She was sealing her note when Tom Nichols joined her.

"Let me give it to the chauffeur," he exclaimed, taking the envelope from her. "I'll come right back."

Marjorie was still sitting before the mahogany desk when Tom returned. "May I smoke?" he inquired, pulling out his cigarette-case.

She nodded absently; then turned and studied him covertly as he stood by the fireplace intent on lighting his cigarette, his well-knit, soldierly figure silhouetted against the flickering light from the wood fire blazing on the hearth. They were second cousins, and since his detail with his battery at Fort Myer, Virginia, she had grown to know and admire the fine qualities and kindly heart carefully hidden under his off-hand manner. She debated whether she should take him into her confidence. He was her

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nearest male relative; he would surely advise her how best to refute Admiral Lawrence's charge, and help her to prove her innocence of the theft of the codicil.

"Where is Aunt Yvonett?" she asked suddenly.

"She went upstairs to lie down." Tom threw a half-burnt match into the fire, crossed the room, and sat down facing Marjorie. "What's up, Madge?" he questioned gravely. "You are not a bit like yourself. Won't you tell me the cause?"

"I had just decided to ask your advice; thank you for making it easier for me," a pitiful little smile accompanied the words, and Tom impulsively clasped her hand in his.

"Little Cousin," he began earnestly. "I don't like to see you so constantly with Chichester Barnard. I am sure he is making you unhappy."

Marjorie whitened to her lips. "I, unhappy?" she exclaimed. "No, you overestimate his abilities."

"No I don't; Chichester is more than merely handsome, he is fascinating; and his influence is the greater."

Marjorie rose slowly to her feet and a long sigh escaped her.

"After all, Tom, I don't believe I'll confide in you—you would not understand."

CHAPTER IV

TEMPTING FATE

MARJORIE, on her way out to keep her appointment with Mrs. Calderon Fordyce, paused in the hall to examine the mail which Minerva, deeply engrossed in the arrival of Miss Rebekah Graves, had deposited on the hatstand and forgotten. Two of the envelopes contained circulars, and she tossed them back on the marble stand, but the third was a note from their family lawyer curtly informing Marjorie that the savings bank in which Madame Yvonett kept a small reserve account, had failed, and asking her to break the news to her aunt.

Marjorie stumbled back and leaned weakly against the newel post, her strength stricken from her. All that Madame Yvonett had been able to save—gone! Oh, it was too cruel to be believed! From upstairs came the sound of voices, and her aunt's merry laugh rang out cheerily. "The lightest heart makes sometimes heaviest mourning"—the words recurred to Marjorie as she started blindly up the stairs, the lawyer's letter still clutched in her hand.

She found her aunt in her bedroom talking to

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Miss Rebekah Graves, a spinster whose brusque and didactic manner often gave offense. She had also a most annoying habit of dragging in her religious beliefs in ordinary conversation, and her intimate knowledge of the divine intentions of Providence was a constant source of wonder to her friends. Opposite as they were in character and beliefs, she and Madame Yvonett were warmly attached to each other, and Marjorie was thankful for the spinster's presence, fearing as she did that her bad news might give Madame Yvonett another heart attack. As gently as she could she told her aunt of her financial loss.

"Thee means, child, that my money is gone?" asked Madame Yvonett dully, as Marjorie came to a breathless pause.

"Yes. The bank has failed . . . "

"The Lord's will be done!" ejaculated Miss Rebekah in devout resignation.

"Thee is wrong, Rebekah; thy God and mine had no hand in the bank's failure," retorted Madame Yvonett, her keen sense of humor dominating her impulse to cry as the realization of her loss dawned upon her. "The devil who tempts men to wickedness has wrought *his* will in this. What is thee giving me, Marjorie?"

"Some cognac; you must take it, Aunt Yvonett," noting the pallor stealing upward and the trembling of the bravely smiling lips. "You must not worry, dearie," handing her the wineglass. "I have a feeling luck is going to change . . . "

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"Misfortunes never come singly," prophesied Miss Rebekah, her pessimistic spirit surrendering at once to dismal forebodings.

"Rot!" exclaimed Marjorie, darting an indignant glance at the spinster, who bridled at the disrespectful intonation of her voice. "You are not to worry, Aunt Yvonné; I'll recover that money by hook or by crook. Cousin Becky will look after you until I return from seeing Mrs. Fordyce. I won't be any longer than I can help," and gathering up her belongings, she departed.

The clocks were just chiming the hour of five when Marjorie reached her destination, and a footman in imposing livery showed her at once into the drawing-room.

"Miss Langdon," he announced, and disappeared behind the silken portières.

At first Marjorie thought she was alone as she advanced into the room, then her eyes, grown accustomed to the softly shaded lights, detected a small, white-haired woman sitting in a large easy chair who rose as she drew nearer, and Marjorie saw that she was a hunchback.

"I am glad you have come," she said, taking the hand Marjorie held out in both her own, and leading her gently forward. "But, my dear, I thought you were much older," her eyes traveling over the girl's beautifully molded features and small, well-set head. The November wind had restored the roses in Marjorie's cheeks, and she made a charming picture in her well-cut calling costume and becoming

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hat, both presents from a wealthy friend who had gone into mourning. "It was years ago that your mother wrote me of your birth . . . "

"Perhaps she told you of my sister who died," suggested Marjorie. "She was eight years my senior."

"That must have been it; pull up that chair," Mrs. Fordyce added, resuming her seat. "My husband and I went to the Orient shortly after her letter, and gradually my correspondence with your mother ceased; but I have many happy memories of our school days. Perhaps you have heard her speak of me—Flora McPherson?"

"Of course, how stupid of me!" exclaimed Marjorie, suddenly enlightened. "Mother often told me of your pranks at boarding-school."

"I was well and strong in those days." A slight sigh escaped Mrs. Fordyce. "This curvature of the spine developed from injuries received in a railroad wreck. Your mother would never recognize her old play-fellow now;" a suspicious moisture dimmed her eyes, and she added hastily, "Throw off your wraps, my dear, and make yourself comfortable. I want to have a long talk with you."

Obediently Marjorie threw back her furs and loosened her coat, as a velvet-footed servant entered with the tea-tray and placed it on the table by Mrs. Fordyce, and deftly arranged the cups and saucers. He left the room to return in a moment carrying a "Curate's delight" filled with plates of delicious sandwiches and cake.

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"How will you have your tea?" asked Mrs. Fordyce, removing the cover from the Dutch silver caddy and placing some of the leaves in the teapot while she waited for the water to boil in the kettle.

"Moderately strong, one lump of sugar, and lemon," replied Marjorie.

"Our tastes are similar; I hope it's a good omen," smiled Mrs. Fordyce. "Try some of these sandwiches."

"How did you discover that I am the daughter of your old friend?" inquired Marjorie.

"Mrs. Nicholas McIntyre, who was at Emma Willard's school at the same time your mother and I were boarders there, told me of you. She admires you greatly."

"Bless her heart!" ejaculated Marjorie warmly. "She has been lovely to me since mother's death. I didn't know she had returned to Washington."

"I don't believe she has. I met her in New York just before coming here, and she advised me——" she broke off abruptly. "How old are you?"

"I have just passed my twenty-fourth birthday."

"You don't look a day over eighteen." Mrs. Fordyce frowned perplexedly at the singing teakettle. "Mrs. McIntyre said you were private secretary to Admiral Lawrence . . ."

"I have been," interrupted Marjorie, "but I am with him no longer."

"Then you could come to me—but"—checking herself. "You are so young——"

"Why should my age, or lack of it, be a bar to

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my doing secretary work?" questioned Marjorie, looking in puzzled surprise at her hostess. "I write a fair hand, I am a moderately good stenographer and typewriter, and if you need a social secretary . . . "

"But I don't require a secretary," said Mrs. Fordyce. "I want an official chaperon for my daughter, Janet."

"Oh!" The ejaculation escaped Marjorie unwittingly, and she flushed slightly, fearing the older woman might be displeased by her open astonishment. But Mrs. Fordyce, teacup poised in air, sat gazing intently at her, oblivious of her confusion. Apparently what she saw pleased her, for she came to a sudden resolution.

"I am going to make you a proposition," she began, and Marjorie's hopes rose. "My infirmity prevents my accepting formal invitations, so I cannot accompany my daughter to entertainments. I do not want Janet to go alone, nor do I wish her to be dependent on the kindness of friends to see that she has a good time. I expected to find you older; however, on second's thought, that doesn't matter so much. Janet would far rather have a companion than a stately dowager as chaperon. Will you accept the position?"

"What will be my—my duties?" stammered Marjorie, somewhat overwhelmed at the task offered her.

"To accompany Janet to dances, the theater, and call with her, and preside at any entertainments we may give for her. See that she meets the right

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people, and wears the proper clothes," wound up Mrs. Fordyce. "Your salary will be a hundred and fifty dollars a month."

"Oh, Mrs. Fordyce, that's entirely too much," protested Marjorie, aghast.

"You will earn it," retorted Mrs. Fordyce. "The demands on your time will be very great. Come to think of it, I believe you had better spend the winter here with us."

"Here? In this house?" Marjorie's eyes grew big with wonder. "I—I don't believe I could leave Aunt Yvonett——" she stopped abruptly. After all her aunt would not be alone; Cousin Rebekah Graves would take most watchful care of her; she would not be greatly missed at the little house in Thirteenth Street, in fact, it would mean one mouth less to feed. With such a salary, she could turn over fully a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month to her aunt; the money would be sorely needed now that the bank's failure had carried away Madame Yvonett's small hoard.

If she accepted Mrs. Fordyce's offer, her lines would fall in pleasant places. Marjorie glanced with increasing satisfaction about the large, well-proportioned room with its costly hangings, handsome furniture, and rare bric-a-brac. She was a bit of a Sybarite, and the beautiful things, the outward and visible signs of wealth about her, satisfied that craving. To go to dances, theaters, and dinners—what more could a girl want?

Her eyes wandered back to Mrs. Fordyce, who

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sat patiently awaiting her decision. Except for the ugly, curved back, the older woman, in her dainty teagown, might have been a piece of Dresden china, so pink and white were her unwrinkled cheeks, and her features finely chiseled. Her dark, delicately arched eyebrows were in sharp contrast to her snow-white hair. Mrs. Fordyce had a simplicity and charm of manner which endeared her to high and low. As Marjorie encountered the full gaze of her handsome eyes, she almost cried out, so much pathos and hidden tragedy was in their dark depths. She rose impulsively to her feet.

"Mrs. Fordyce," she said, "I will gladly accept, but——wait," she stumbled in her speech. "Admiral Lawrence dismissed me this morning because——because a valuable paper was missing."

There was a moment's pause.

"Did you steal the paper?" asked Mrs. Fordyce quietly. Marjorie winced, but her eyes never wavered before the other's calm regard.

"No." The monosyllable was clear and unfaltering. "But Admiral Lawrence believes I did."

Marjorie found the lengthening silence intolerable. Her hands crept up to her coat and she buttoned it, then she commenced putting on her gloves.

"When can you come to me?" inquired Mrs. Fordyce finally.

"You—you want me?" Marjorie advanced a step, half-incredulous. "After what I've just told you?"

"I do."

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"Oh, you good woman!" With a swift, graceful movement Marjorie stooped and laid her lips to the blue-veined hand resting on the chair arm.

"I flatter myself I'm a woman of some perception," replied Mrs. Fordyce, coloring warmly. "And truth doesn't always lie at the bottom of a well."

Half an hour later all details of her engagement as chaperon were satisfactorily settled, and bidding Mrs. Fordyce a warm good-night, Marjorie, lighter hearted than she had been in many a day, tripped down the hall and through the front door held open by a deferential footman. As she gained the sidewalk a limousine turned in under the porte-cochère and stopped before the door she had just left. Pausing to readjust her furs, she saw a familiar figure spring out of the motor, and a well-known voice said clearly:

"Look out for that step, Miss Fordyce," and Chichester Barnard caught his companion's arm in time to save her from a fall as she descended from the motor.

Marjorie watched them enter the lighted vestibule, her thoughts in riot. Chichester Barnard's "business engagement" had not prevented his dancing attendance upon another girl—and she, Marjorie Langdon, was to be that girl's official chaperon.

CHAPTER V

GIVE AND TAKE

DOES everything look in order in the dining-room, Duncan?" inquired Mrs. Fordyce anxiously, on her son's entrance, laying down the magazine she was reading.

"Of course it is, dear mother," he replied, sitting down on the lounge beside her. "You can always trust Perkins to arrange the table decorations to the Queen's taste. Why so anxious tonight?"

"It is our first dinner-party in Washington, and I want everything to go off well for Janet's sake. First impressions count for so much."

Duncan laughed outright. "You, mother, worrying about a simple dinner of sixteen? Your Beacon Street ancestors will disown you."

"My dear, Beacon Street traditions and Washington etiquette have to assimilate slowly. The official and diplomatic life here presents many pitfalls for the unwary, and Janet is young . . ."

"But you have provided her with a chaperon." Duncan yawned as he arranged his white tie.

"The chaperon isn't any too old," confessed Mrs. Fordyce. She had not taken her family entirely into her confidence in referring to Marjorie, content-

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ing herself with mentioning the fact, two days before, that she had engaged a chaperon for Janet, a statement which raised a storm of protest on that young débutante's part.

"Then why in the world did you engage her?" asked Duncan.

Mrs. Fordyce debated the question. "Mrs. McIntyre assured me she was altogether charming, and most popular. She said she knew Washington's complex social system to a dot . . ."

"And we are to supply the dash?" Duncan shrugged his broad shoulders. "Apparently you have secured a domestic treasure; well, your plan may work out all right, but, mother, I don't like the idea of your retiring so much from social life."

"With my infirmity I cannot face strangers; don't ask me, dear."

"Mother! As if anyone ever thinks of that after they have once met you," exclaimed Duncan, greatly touched by the unuttered grief in Mrs. Fordyce's eyes, and he gave her an impulsive hug.

"Here, here, this will never do," protested a hearty voice from the other end of the boudoir. "Duncan, my boy, do you realize there are young 'buds' downstairs waiting for your fond embraces?"

"Oh, get out!" retorted Duncan undutifully.

"Are our guests arriving, Calderon?" asked Mrs. Fordyce in some alarm. "And you are not in the drawing-room?"

"Perhaps they haven't come just yet," admitted

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her husband. "Don't take me too literally, Flora. Where did you pick up the chaperon?"

"She came to me highly recommended," said Mrs. Fordyce, her placid manner undisturbed. "You were not in town, Calderon——"

"As if that would have made any difference?" he chuckled. "My dearest, your wish is law in this house; if you want a dozen chaperons you shall have them. I predict, Duncan," turning to his son who had risen and was lazily stretching himself, "that with Janet and her chaperon on deck, we shall have a lively winter."

"Back to the wilds for me!" retorted Duncan. "Tell me, mother, did your chaperon pick out our guests tonight?"

"Oh, no; Janet selected the young girls and men who have already shown her attention, the invitations were sent out over ten days ago. You see, in place of giving a big reception to introduce Janet, I plan to have a series of weekly dinner-dances."

"What is the name of your paragon?" asked Duncan.

"Marjorie Langdon, her mother was an old school friend of mine."

"The name sounds familiar," Duncan wrinkled his brow in puzzled thought.

"Go down and meet her and then you'll be certain about it," put in his father. "Now, Flora, will you give me your attention . . ."

Taking the hint Duncan strode to the door and vanished. As he reached the head of the staircase

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he heard his name called, and turning around, saw Janet standing before the elevator shaft. He retraced his steps and joined her, and they entered the lift together.

"How do I look, Duncan?" she asked eagerly, turning slowly around for his inspection, as the automatic car shot downward.

"The gown's all right; the worst piece is in the middle," he teased, glancing admiringly at her blond prettiness. She was dressed in exquisite taste, and her suddenly acquired grown-up manner sat quaintly upon her. Her slightly offended expression caused him to add hastily: "I like your hair arranged that way."

"I do think it's becoming," admitted Janet, twisting about in the lift so as to catch a better glimpse of herself in the tiny mirror. "Marjorie Langdon dressed it for me. Do you know, Duncan, I believe I'm going to like her."

He was saved from comment by the stopping of the lift, and Janet, her dignity flying to the four winds, scampered over to the drawing-room. Duncan followed her more slowly, and paused abruptly at the threshold of the room on perceiving a tall girl arranging roses in a vase, on one of the empire tables.

Marjorie Langdon belonged to a type which appears to greater advantage in evening dress than in street costume, and with half-cynical, wholly critical eyes Duncan studied the girl, who, unaware of his presence, stood with her profile turned toward him. In her shimmering white gown, which suited her perfectly, and her color heightened by the excitement

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of her first official appearance in the Fordyce house, she was well worth a second look.

"Lord! she needs a chaperon herself," Duncan muttered under his breath, then stepped toward her as Marjorie looked in his direction. "I shall have to present myself, Miss Langdon—Duncan Fordyce," he said pleasantly. "My sister Janet is too much excited to remember the formalities."

"I beg your pardon," broke in Janet from the window seat. "I thought you two had met."

Successfully concealing her surprise under a friendly smile, Marjorie shook his hand cordially; until that moment she had not known of Duncan Fordyce's existence. "When did you come to Washington?" she inquired.

"Three days ago——" the arrival of his father and several other men interrupted his speech.

Ten minutes later the last guest had arrived, and Duncan, keeping up a detached conversation with a nervous débutante, watched Marjorie with increasing interest. Her youth might be against her as a chaperon, but her poise and good breeding left nothing to be desired. No sign of awkwardness was discernible in her manner as she stood by Janet's side assisting her in receiving the guests, and Calderon Fordyce, stopping beside his son, whispered a vehement: "She'll do." His attention distracted, Duncan failed to see one guest's quickly concealed astonishment on beholding Marjorie standing beside Janet.

"You here!" exclaimed Chichester Barnard. "How—how—delightful!"

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"Thank you," replied Marjorie gently. "I think, Chichester, you are to take out our hostess, Miss Fordyce," as the butler and footman parted the portières. "Ah, Baron von Valkenberg, am I your fate? Suppose we wait until the others have gone out," and she stepped back, the diplomat at her side.

After the arrival of the ices, Marjorie permitted herself a second's relaxation, and sat back in her chair. Both her neighbors were busily engaged in conversation with the young girls sitting on the other side of them, and glad of the respite, she glanced about the table. She had been talking incessantly since the commencement of dinner and her vocal chords actually ached. Everyone seemed to be having a gay time, there was no lull in the conversation. Marjorie took in the handsome silver and glass table appointments, and the beautiful flower centerpiece with secret satisfaction; the dinner and the service had been irreproachable. In fact, the ease and quiet elegance of the dinner recalled her own mother's delightful hospitality before they lost their money. Marjorie sighed involuntarily; then her lips stiffened resolutely. She had, on thinking over Mrs. Fordyce's proposal, decided to back out of her engagement, but Madame Yvonett, delighted with the plan, refused to permit her to withdraw her acceptance, and bag and baggage she had arrived at the Fordyce residence at five o'clock that afternoon.

"Aren't you going to give me a word?" inquired

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Duncan, her left-hand neighbor, turning abruptly to her. "All I've seen of you is a pink ear. Baron von Valkenberg has monopolized you outrageously."

"He is a stranger," replied Marjorie laughing. "He has only been in this country five weeks; I've been trying to make him feel at home."

"A very laudable object; but I'm a stranger, too," protested Duncan. "You might be nice to me."

"But you *are* at home," Marjorie's smile was one of her greatest charms, and Duncan, all unconscious, fell under its spell. "Is this your first visit to Washington?"

"No. When at Yale I used to spend my vacations here with Mrs. McIntyre. That was ten years ago. Do you know, at the two entertainments I've been to already, I saw some of the people I met here then, and they knew me."

"I'm not surprised; Washington is a place where one is never missed and never forgotten. Where have you been since leaving Yale?"

"Knocking about the world," carelessly. "I've just come up from Panama. Who's the good-looking man sitting on my sister's right?"

"Chichester Barnard."

"Oh!" The name struck a chord of memory, and the scene at the Turkish bath three days before flashed before Duncan and he frowned. Some telepathy seemed to tell Barnard that he was under discussion, and catching Marjorie's eye across the table, he raised his champagne glass in gay challenge. She lifted hers to her lips in

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response, and set it down untasted. "He's remarkably fine looking," reiterated Duncan. "Something Byronic about him."

"Yes," agreed Marjorie; then turned abruptly to Baron von Valkenberg, who, having refused the sweets, had been for the past five minutes reaching under the table in a manner which suggested the loss of his napkin. "What's the matter, Baron?"

The young diplomat straightened up suddenly, and gravely replied: "I sink it is a flea."

For a moment gravity was at a discount, then Marjorie, catching Janet's eye, rose, and the guests and their hostess trooped back into the drawing-room.

The men wasted but a short time over their cigars and liqueur, and soon the dancing in the ballroom was in full swing. It was after midnight when Chichester Barnard approached Marjorie and asked for a dance. There was a barely perceptible pause, then, with a word of thanks to her former partner, she laid her hand on Barnard's arm, and they floated out on the floor. They were two of the best dancers in Washington, and Duncan, dancing with Janet, watched them with an odd feeling of unrest. They had circled the room but twice when Barnard stopped near the entrance to the library.

"I must talk to you, Madge," he whispered hurriedly. "Come in here," and he led the way to a comfortable leather-covered divan. They had the room to themselves. "Why didn't you consult me before coming here as chaperon."

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"Because I did not think my affairs interested you further."

"Madge!" The soft, caressing voice held a note of keen reproach. "How can you so misjudge me?"

But she refused to be placated. "It's some days since I have seen you," she replied wearily. "How is your aunt, Mrs. Lawrence?"

"About the same, I believe," shortly. "Tell me, how did you come to give up your secretary work there?"

"You ask me that?" A sparkle of anger darkened Marjorie's eyes, and he glanced uncomfortably at the mantel clock. "You are better informed as to what transpires in the Lawrence home than I am."

"I don't know what you mean," he complained. "Admiral Lawrence has a grudge against me, witness his advising my aunt to cut me out of her will; and now I believe he has influenced you to turn against me. Madge, it's not like you to go back on a pal," he added bitterly.

"I am not the one who has 'gone back,'" she retorted with spirit. "And I think it's best, all things considered, to return you this"—taking a heavy gold signet ring out of a fold of her bodice and placing it in his hand.

He looked at it in stupefied silence for a moment, then threw it contemptuously on the large library table.

"Do you think by returning that ring that you can break the tie that binds me to you, my darling?"

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he cried, real feeling in voice and gesture. "That bit of gold is but a symbol of my love—as long as life lasts, my heart, my homage, are yours." Her pulse quickened under the ardor in his eyes. "God! why am I poor!" He struck one fist impotently in his other palm. "Cannot you understand, my darling, that it hurts me cruelly to see you living here as a paid chaperon when you should reign as queen."

"Miss Langdon," called Janet from the doorway. "Our guests are waiting to say good-bye."

Marjorie, dragged once more to earth, started guiltily for the door, without a glance at her companion. A chaperon had small right to sit in corners with attractive men.

After the last guest had departed Marjorie, leaving Janet and her father and brother discussing the events of the evening, slipped back into the library. But her search of the table and other pieces of furniture was fruitless.

"In spite of his protests, he pocketed the ring," she muttered, and a queer smile crossed her lips.

CHAPTER VI

AT FORT MYER

THIS way, sir; your seats are in the upper gallery," announced a cavalry corporal.

"Right up here, miss," and he assisted Janet up the first steps of the narrow stairway, then made way for Chichester Barnard who followed her. "Let me see your tickets, please," continued the corporal as Duncan Fordyce appeared at his elbow, Marjorie in his wake. "Very sorry, sir, but these seats are in the north gallery at the other end of the riding-hall. You'll have to go outside to get there, sir."

"Thundering devils!" ejaculated Duncan, taking back the two pink pasteboards. "Mrs. Walbridge sold mother these four tickets. I supposed the seats were all together. Wait here just a minute, Miss Marjorie, and I'll run out to the ticket agent and see if I can't exchange these seats for others on this side of the hall."

Marjorie nodded a cheerful assent, and in Duncan's absence watched the new arrivals swarming into the building. The annual drill, given under the auspices of the Woman's Army Relief Society, was a great event, not only at Fort Myer but in the

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National Capital and Georgetown as well, and fashionable society had apparently turned out en masse to attend it.

"Splendid success, Marjorie," boomed a voice close to her ear, and turning she recognized Mrs. Walbridge, majestic in her ermine coat and nearly two hundred pounds avoirdupois. "The ticket committee told me the President and most of his Cabinet will be here. The hall is sold out. Haven't you a seat, child?"

"Yes, I am waiting for——" the name was lost in the slamming down of chairs and the stamping of feet.

"That's all right," exclaimed Mrs. Walbridge, much relieved. "I couldn't have you stand. Be sure and bring your escort over to the Administration Building for tea after the drill," and she moved ponderously down the aisle to her seat.

"Sorry to have been so long," apologized Duncan, rejoining Marjorie. "I succeeded in exchanging my tickets for two seats in this lower section. Come on," but Marjorie held back, and her face grew troubled.

"Hadn't I better go upstairs and sit with your sister, and let Mr. Barnard join you in these lower seats?" she asked.

"You take your chaperonage too seriously," declared Duncan firmly. "I hardly ever see you alone, Miss Marjorie, and now Fate has given me a chance to enjoy myself, I decline to have your New England conscience spoil my fun. But if it

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will make you feel any easier, I'll run up and tell Barnard where we are sitting. Here, Corporal, show this lady to her chair," and he turned and dashed upstairs.

Marjorie slowly followed the non-commissioned officer down the aisle to the front row, speaking to her different friends as she passed them. As she made herself comfortable in the narrow chair, she recognized Baron von Valkenberg and the military attachés of the foreign embassies at Washington, always interested spectators at the drills, sitting near her. To her left was the box reserved for the President and the Commandant of the Post, draped with the President's personal flag and the Stars and Stripes, while the Chief of Staff and his aides occupied an adjoining box.

Duncan saw Janet and Barnard sitting midway in the front row of the gallery, and with many apologies to the occupants of the chairs whose feet he encountered on his way to them, he reached Barnard's side, and in a few words explained the situation, then, not waiting for comment, turned and ran downstairs, reaching Marjorie's side just as the opening bars of the National Anthem echoed through the hall, and the entire audience rose as the President stepped into his box.

"Oh, isn't it grand!" shouted Janet to Barnard, clapping her hands as a troop of cavalry rode on to the tanbark, and with a ringing cheer, swept at a run down the hall straight to the President's box, their chargers' noses stopping just short of the high

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railing, and their sabers flashing in salute; then the drill was on.

So absorbed was Janet in the different events scheduled that her companion received but scant attention.

"I declare, our soldiers are magnificent!" Janet drew a long breath, and regretfully watched the company of picked roughriders leave the hall.

"You little enthusiast!" Barnard's handsome eyes glowed with some warmer sentiment than mere approval as he studied her piquant face. "Jove! It's a liberal education to know you."

"Now you are making fun of me," she said reproachfully, her foot beating time to the stirring tune the post band was playing across the hall.

"I never was more in earnest." The two heads were bent very close together, and the tender timbre of his voice made her heart beat quicker. "You have no idea, little girl, of the influence you unconsciously exert on those about you. Please God, I'm a better, cleaner man for having known you; only having known you——" his whisper reached her ear alone—"life will never be the same unless you are with me—always!" She stirred uneasily, frightened by the vehemence of his manner. "Surely you guessed," he whispered, bending down so that she looked directly at him. His nearness, his comeliness, held her.

"I—I—don't know!" she slid one trembling hand in his. "I know you better than any other man. I think of you—often."

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His face lightened with hope. "I'll make you love me," and pretending to pick up the program, he stooped and pressed his lips to her hand.

"Oh, don't," she stammered. "Suppose Duncan should see you."

"I am willing that he should," Barnard smiled happily. "But don't worry, your brother is too attentive in another quarter to bother about us."

"Duncan attentive?" in sharp surprise. "To whom?"

But Barnard's eyes had wandered to the high jumping going on below them and apparently he did not hear the question. "He's down!" he shouted as horse and rider plunged headlong to the ground, and for a time he and Janet watched the jumping in absolute silence.

"How do you like your chaperon?" he asked finally.

"Marjorie? Very much, indeed. Father and mother think she is splendid, and she has been just lovely to me. I don't know how I could have gotten through this month without her."

"Good; I'm delighted to hear she's such a success," he exclaimed heartily. "To be candid, I was afraid the experiment wouldn't work. Marjorie is not always easy to get along with; she just lost an awfully good job before your mother engaged her. And Marjorie's so blessed poor, she needs every cent she can make."

"It is fine the way she helps Madame Yvonett," said Janet with genuine enthusiasm. "Marjorie took

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me to see her aunt, and I think she is a darling. I met her cousin there, Captain Nichols——”

“I hope you don’t think he’s a darling also?” in mock jealousy.

“Don’t be absurd!” But a warm color mantled Janet’s face, and to cover her confusion she examined the program. “Oh, I see it is his battery that is to drill this afternoon . . . ”

“And here they come now,” broke in Barnard; a trumpet call drowned his words.

Tom Nichols, looking every inch a soldier, rode at the head of his battery and, after saluting the President, backed his horse to the side of the hall and took up his station there, followed by his trumpeter. Janet, her pulses dancing with excitement, leaned far over the balcony, and watched the battery drill, that most stirring of spectacles, with breathless attention. If her eyes stole now and then from the racing mounted cannoniers, the plunging horses, and leaping gun-carriages to a soldierly figure sitting erect and watchful on a restive charger, no one, not even Barnard, was aware of it.

The two other members of their party sitting in the gallery beneath them, had been almost as absorbed in the exhibition drill as Janet and Barnard.

“Tired?” inquired Duncan, turning to Marjorie. She had watched each thrilling performance in silent enjoyment, replying mostly in monosyllables to his few remarks, and Duncan, slowly learning to divine her moods and tenses, had been content to sit quietly

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by her side, only occasionally stealing covert glances in her direction.

"No, indeed," she protested. "I feel 'abominably refreshed,' as Aunt Yvonett puts it. Is the drill over?"

"Apparently so." Duncan rose and Marjorie followed his example. "Stand here out of the crowd," he suggested a moment later as they approached the entrance. "We can see Janet and Barnard as they come down." But the crowd had thinned materially, and the band was playing its last stirring quick-step, before the others put in their appearance.

"Awfully sorry to be so long," apologized Barnard, holding open the large swing door for Marjorie to pass through. "Where to now?"

"There's a tea-dance at the Administration Building," began Marjorie. "Shall we go over there?"

"I have a better plan than that," put in a voice behind her, and Tom Nichols joined the little group. "Come and have tea with me; I am particularly anxious to have you see my quarters." The invitation was addressed to Marjorie and her companions, but Tom's eyes sought Janet, and impulsively she responded to their mute pleading.

"Of course we'll come," and slipping her hand inside Marjorie's arm, she kept step with Tom as he piloted them across the parade grounds. Duncan paused long enough to direct his chauffeur to bring the limousine to Captain Nichols' quarters, then hastened after them. With no little pride Tom ushered his guests into his semi-detached house.

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"Let me help you off with your coat, Miss Fordyce," he said, but he was too late; Barnard was already assisting her. Slightly discomfited Tom turned back to Marjorie, only to find she had stepped into the parlor, and was gazing into the lighted dining-room which opened out of it.

"Are you a magician, Tom?" she asked. "Here is your table all set for tea, and you only knew three minutes ago that we were coming."

Tom reddened under his tan. "I hoped you would come; Miss Fordyce told me at the Army and Navy Club last night that she had tickets for the drill." Janet, scenting a discussion, hurried into the parlor, followed by her brother and Barnard. "Besides," added Tom, with honest intent, but stumbling over his speech. "I—eh—gave a—eh—half invitation to Joe Cooper to bring his mother and sister—there they are now," and he hastened into the reception hall as the electric bell buzzed.

Marjorie stifled an impatient sigh; she did not like the Calhoun-Coopers. The dislike was mutual. They had tried assiduously to cultivate the Fordyces, and Marjorie's veiled opposition to any intimacy between Pauline Calhoun-Cooper and Janet had aroused their silent enmity.

"Mother was very sorry not to be able to come," announced a penetrating voice in the hall. "It was too sweet of you to ask us. Is this your parlor?" and the portières were pulled back, admitting a strikingly gowned young woman whose good looks were slightly marred by a discontented expression.

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"Dear Miss Fordyce, so glad to see you," she gushed. "And of course, Miss Langdon," but the latter handshake was perfunctory, and Pauline turned with added warmth to greet Duncan and Barnard. Joe Calhoun-Cooper was more quiet in his entrance, and Tom was leading his guests into the dining-room before Duncan noticed his presence. Barnard, lingering in the background, observed Duncan's curt nod and Joe's darkening face, and his curiosity was instantly aroused. It was the first time Joe had met Duncan since their encounter in the dormitory of the Turkish Bath, Joe having been in New York, but he had neither forgotten nor forgiven Duncan for his plain speech that day, and the physical force with which he had punctuated his meaning.

"Will you take charge of the tea, Madge?" asked Tom, pulling out the chair at the head of the table. "I hope everything is here," anxiously examining the bountifully supplied table. "Let me draw up a chair for you, Miss Fordyce." Then turning to the others. "Do make yourselves comfortable," he entreated.

Duncan found himself sandwiched in between Pauline and her brother, Joe, and at some distance from Marjorie. He was spared the trouble of making small talk, for Pauline took that matter into her own hands, and kept up a running fire of comment which required only an occasional answer. To his great annoyance he discovered that Barnard and Marjorie were holding an animated, low-toned conversation, and Barnard's manner was becoming

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more intense as the slow minutes passed. Pauline finally observed which way Duncan's attention was straying, and her black eyes snapped with anger.

"They make a very handsome couple," she whispered confidentially, nodding toward Marjorie. "An old affair . . ."

Duncan favored her with a blank, noncommittal stare, while inwardly furious. "Ah, indeed," vaguely, then in a voice which made his sister jump, he called out: "Nice quarters you have, Nichols."

"Mighty glad you like them, old man," replied Tom, beaming with pleasure. "Marjorie came over here when I first moved in and helped me settle the house. She deserves all the praise."

"I do not," contradicted Marjorie, breaking off her tête-à-tête with Barnard, and Duncan sat back well satisfied. "Aunt Yvonné is responsible for your home."

"I never knew before that bachelors had so much furniture," chimed in Pauline.

"They don't," replied Tom. "Most of this stuff," waving his hand vaguely toward the heavy pieces of furniture, "belongs to the Government."

"How long is your detail here?" asked Barnard.

"There is no specified limit, but we are expecting to be ordered to another station very shortly."

"I should think you'd hate to give up all this furniture when you move away," commented Janet, looking admiringly about the cozy room.

"I'll find some exactly like it in the officers' quarters at my next post," carelessly. "Uncle Sam partly

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furnishes all the houses on Government Reservations, you know. What I shall miss will be Washington."

"Perhaps the War Department will extend your detail here," exclaimed Marjorie hopefully.

"No such luck," groaned Tom. "Now, in the good old days . . . I suppose you have all heard of the marine officer who was stationed for so many years at the marine barracks in Washington, that when he died he bequeathed his Government quarters in the Yard to his daughters in his will, thinking it belonged to him."

"If you don't want to leave Washington, Tom, why don't you chuck the service?" asked Joe. "You are a bloated plutocrat now."

"What does he mean, Tom?" demanded Marjorie quickly. "Have you inherited money?"

"No. Shut up, Joe."

"Well, with your luck anything might happen," protested Joe. "If you don't resign they may make you a major-general."

"Bosh!" Tom looked as provoked as he felt. "Let me explain Joe's nonsense. When in Brussels two years ago, I attended the Vieux Marché where the townspeople and peasants bring old junk on Sundays to be sold for what it will bring, and I picked up an old coin for five centimes. The other day I heard Admiral Lawrence discussing numismatology in the club, and it occurred to me to show my coin to an antique dealer. Joe went with me yesterday, and I'm blessed if the dealer didn't tell me the coin

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was worth between twelve and fifteen hundred dollars."

"Oh, how romantic!" ejaculated Pauline, and Janet looked her interest.

"Let's see the coin, Tom," suggested Joe, "or have you sold it?"

"No, the dealer only gave me the address of a New York coin collector whom he thought would buy it. If you really care to see the coin," looking anxiously at Janet, who nodded her head vigorously. "Just a moment, I'll run upstairs and get it."

Pauline promptly opened a lively conversation with Barnard across the table, and Duncan was just thinking of changing his seat when Tom rejoined them carrying a small pasteboard box.

"There, isn't that an ugly thing to be worth all that gold," he said, placing the coin in Janet's hand, and the others crowded about to get a better look at it.

"There's no accounting for taste," admitted Janet, handing it back to Tom. "Personally I'd rather buy . . ."

A long blue flame shot out from under the tea-kettle, and Marjorie jumped from her seat in alarm.

"Lord! the alcohol lamp's busted," shouted Tom, dropping the pasteboard box on the sideboard, and reaching over he seized the boiling kettle and its nickel frame. "Open the window, Fordyce," and he tossed the burning lamp out on the ground where it exploded harmlessly. "Were you burned, Madge?" he asked, returning to her side.

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"Oh, no, only frightened; the flame shot at me so suddenly." Marjorie passed a nervous hand over her mouth, conscious that her lips were trembling.

"I really think we must be leaving," broke in Pauine. She did not like having attention diverted from herself, and playing second fiddle to a girl who worked for her living was too novel a sensation to be agreeable. "We've had a delightful time, Captain; good-bye everybody," and she sailed out of the room, accompanied by her flurried host and her brother.

"I don't like to hurry you, Janet, but we must be going also," said Marjorie quietly.

"Yes, it's later than I thought," responded the younger girl. "Gracious, I entirely forgot we are going to the theater tonight."

"We will all meet there," Barnard helped Janet into her coat with solicitous care. "Nichols and I are both invited by Judge and Mrs. Walbridge."

"Good-bye, Tom, we've had an awfully good time," Marjorie gave her cousin's hand an affectionate squeeze as he helped her into the limousine. The Calhoun-Coopers' car was already a dim speck in the distance.

"Good-bye—see you all tonight," shouted Tom, and watched the limousine out of sight. On re-entering the house he was on the point of going upstairs when he remembered the coin. Retracing his footsteps he went to the sideboard in the dining-room and opened the box. It was empty.

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Tom glanced in deep perplexity at the box, and then about the room. He had a very distinct recollection of stuffing the coin back into the box just as the flame from the lamp leaped out, and of dropping the closed box on the sideboard. There had been only himself and his guests in the house, for he had sent his striker over to assist at the tea-dance at the Administration Building, after first setting his master's tea table.

Tom went rapidly through all his pockets; then searched the room, then the parlor; next he went into the servants' quarters and, as he expected, found them empty. From there he went over the house, but he was the only person in it, and the windows and doors were all securely locked. Convinced of that fact, he returned to the dining-room, and dropped bewildered into the nearest chair. His eyes fell on the uptilted cardboard box; there was even a slight impress left on the cotton where the coin had lain.

"It's gone!" exclaimed Tom aloud. "Really gone!" And his face was as blank as the opposite wall.

CHAPTER VII

TREASURE TROVE

MINERVA glared at her image in the glass she was polishing with unusual diligence. "A cleanin' an' a cleanin'," she exclaimed rebelliously. "Miss Rebekah don't hardly 'low me time ter eat. Miss Marjorie didn't never turn me inter a—a—flyin' squadron"—Minerva hadn't the faintest idea of the meaning of "flying squadron," but she had picked up the words while waiting at table, and they sounded big enough to express her state of mind. "An' I ain't gwine ter church ter-morro', nohow; las' time I went, I come home an' foun' Miss Rebekah had done took all my china an' glass off de pantry shelves, an' I had ter put it back. What kind ob a Christian am she, anyhow? An' when I'm down on my marrow bones a scrubbin' de flo', she flops down an' keeps me a prayin' fo' five minutes. Lan' sakes! dar's de bell." Hastily washing her hands and putting a white apron over her gingham one, she took her leisurely way to the front door.

"Howdy, Marse Tom?" she exclaimed, showing all her ivories in an expansive smile on seeing the young officer standing in the vestibule. "De Madam

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will be mighty glad ter see yo'; step right inter de pawlor, I'll go tell her yo' am hyar."

Madame Yvonett found Tom walking restlessly up and down the small room when she entered a few minutes later.

"I am pleased to see thee, Thomas," she said, kissing him warmly. "Thee finds us rather topsyturvey; this is cleaning day, but make thyself comfortable, I will sit here," selecting her customary high back arm-chair, and producing her knitting.

Tom established himself in one end of the rose-wood sofa.

"You must miss Marjorie awfully," he said, inspecting the disarranged room with some wonder.

"I do;" an involuntary sigh escaped Madame Yvonett. "Marjorie is young, but she understands the foibles of the old; she is a good child."

"I'm afraid Cousin Rebekah Graves is a bit too strenuous for you."

"Becky's a trifle breezy, but anything's better than a dead calm," responded the Quakeress. "I am pleased that Marjorie is with the Fordyces; from what she says they must be charming people."

"They are," declared Tom with such positiveness that a faint gleam of amusement lit his companion's eyes. "Has Marjorie been in to see you today?"

"No. She usually comes about this time on her return from market. Thee knows Mrs. Fordyce has turned the housekeeping over to her."

"It strikes me they put a great deal on Marjorie . . ."

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"Tut! Marjorie's shoulders are young and broad. It would be better if the younger generation carried more responsibilities; too much is done for them by their elders. In my day"—dropping her knitting in her lap as she warmed to her subject—"the development of character went hand-in-hand with education; now, education is founded on indulgence. The modern child must be amused, spoiled, its fits of temper condoned . . . "

"Spare the rod and spoil the child," quoted Tom, in open amusement.

"A sound doctrine," affirmed Madame Yvonett with spirit. "And if the American nation is to endure, character in the child must be cultivated."

"There's a lot in what you say," agreed Tom. "I came in this morning hoping to see you alone;" he rose and sat down close by her. "I am anxious to consult you about an incident that occurred yesterday afternoon in my quarters," and in a few words he described the disappearance of the coin.

Madame Yvonett listened with absorbed attention to the story, and at its conclusion, sat back and gazed unbelievably at Tom, her busy needles idly suspended in air.

"Does thee mean to say thee can find no trace of the coin?" she asked incredulously.

"It has disappeared absolutely."

"Is thee certain that thy servant was not in the house at the time the lamp exploded?"

"Positive. Mrs. Sims, wife of the Commandant, told me he was assisting the other servants in the

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Administration Building from the commencement of the tea-dance until its close."

"Then thee infers that one of thy guests stole the coin?"

"What other conclusion can I reach?" hopelessly. "And yet it's a devilish thought."

"Has thee suspicions against anyone in particular?" Madame Yvonett paled as she put the question, but she sat with her back to the light and Tom did not perceive her agitation.

"Yes, I have," reluctantly. "Joe Calhoun-Cooper."

"Cooper? Ah, yes, I recollect; thee means John C. Cooper's grandson. What leads thee to suspect him?"

"I know he's hard up; he's been trying to borrow money, his father having shut down on his allowance;" Tom paused thoughtfully, then continued. "Joe was with me when I learned the coin's value. He first spoke of it yesterday—I never should have mentioned the matter—and suggested I show the coin to my guests, evidently depending on chance to give him an opportunity to steal it."

"It dove-tails nicely," acknowledged Madame Yvonett. "In fact, too nicely; beware, Thomas, be not hasty in thy judgment."

"I'm not," doggedly. "Joe's always been tricky, even as a schoolboy."

"Then how does it happen that thee associates with him now?"

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"Well—eh—his family have been very decent to me, and I've gone there a good bit." Madame Yvonett's shrewd eyes twinkled. "While accepting their hospitality I couldn't refuse to know Joe. Although I've never liked him, I knew no real ground for dropping him, until now," and Tom's pleasant face hardened.

"Does thee intend to prosecute him for the theft of the coin?"

"I haven't quite decided," admitted Tom. "The loss of such a sum of money means a good deal to me; still, I have only the dealer's word that the coin was worth between twelve and fifteen hundred dollars. I could have Joe arrested," doubtfully. "It's a dirty business. Perhaps it would be better to keep silent, but tell Joe to leave Washington or I'll expose his rascality."

"Thee'll have to secure more proof against him to make that threat effective," put in Madame Yvonett, sagely.

"I've already written to the coin collector in New York, describing my coin, and asking him to notify me if such a coin is offered to him, and by whom. Joe was with me when the dealer here gave me the New Yorker's address.

"That is a good move," Madame Yvonett nodded approvingly.

"I've also notified the Washington dealer, and he has agreed to send a letter to other well-known numismatists telling them of the coin, and asking for the name of the person who offers it for sale.

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Fortunately the coin is very rare, and its appearance will arouse interest——”

“And cupidity,” chimed in Madame Yvonett. “Collectors are said to be not too scrupulous; if they can buy it cheaply from the thief they will not be likely to notify thee, the real owner.”

“Of course, there’s that danger,” admitted Tom, rising. “I’m afraid I must be going, Cousin Yvonett; you’ve been awfully good to listen to me.”

“I am always interested in anything that concerns thee, Thomas, and thy news to-day is startling. Shall I mention the matter to Marjorie?”

Tom pondered for a moment before answering. “I don’t believe I would; she is thrown a good deal with the Calhoun-Coopers, and knowledge of Joe’s dishonesty might embarrass her in her relations with them.”

“Had thee not better question her about the disappearance of the coin? She may be able to throw some light on the mystery.”

Again Tom shook his head. “If any of the others had seen Joe steal the coin, they would have denounced him then and there, or dropped me a hint later, and Marjorie particularly would have been sure to have done so.”

“That is true, Marjorie has thy interests very much to heart; she has not forgotten how good thee has been to me financially.”

“Don’t you ever speak of that again,” protested Tom warmly. “I’d do everything for you if I could.”

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"Thou is like thy father in generosity," Madame Yvonett patted his shoulder lovingly. "Be cautious in thy actions, Thomas; better lose a coin than wrongfully accuse another. I advise thee to go carefully over the floor of the dining-room and parlor, the coin may have rolled and slipped into a tiny crevice, or down the register."

Tom frowned in disbelief. "There are no registers, the house is heated by steam; however, I'll look again over the furniture and floors. I'm not going to the dinner the Calhoun-Coopers are giving next week. I can't eat their food, believing Joe a thief. Good-bye, I'll be in again soon."

After his departure Madame Yvonett remained seated in the little parlor, her knitting in her lap and her usually industrious fingers at rest, while her thoughts centered themselves on Tom's account of the disappearance of his coin.

"I wish Marjorie had not been present," she said aloud.

"Did you call me?" inquired Miss Rebekah, as she divested herself of her coat and gloves in the hall. "All alone, Cousin Yvonett? Why, Marjorie told me she was surely coming in to be with you."

Marjorie had fully intended stopping in to see her aunt that morning, but she had been delayed in reaching Center Market, and afterwards, having an errand to do on F Street, she had decided to walk instead of taking a street car. Turning the



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corner at Ninth and F Streets she came face to face with Chichester Barnard.

"What good luck to meet you!" His tone of pleasure was convincing in its heartiness, and Marjorie's eyes danced. "Which way are you going?"

"To Brentano's."

"I have an errand there, too," falling into step beside her. "I had a telephone a short time ago from Miss Janet asking me to lunch with them."

"She said she intended to invite you;" some of the sparkle had disappeared from Marjorie's eyes.

"Can you come?"

"Yes, fortunately this is not a very busy day with me," he raised his hat to Mrs. Walbridge who passed them in her automobile. "Are you and Miss Janet going to Mrs. Walbridge's Christmas Eve dance?"

"I think so; here we are," and she led the way inside the book-store. It did not take her long to complete her errand, and she found Barnard waiting for her at the entrance, a magazine tucked under his arm.

"All ready?" he inquired, holding open the door for her. "Are you going to do any more shopping?"

"No."

"Then take a walk with me?" eagerly. "We don't have to be at the Fordyce's until one o'clock."

"I told Aunt Yvonett I would run in for a few minutes on my way uptown . . ."

"You can go there after lunch," broke in Bar-

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nard. "Besides, there's a business matter I must talk over with you."

A premonition of bad news sent a faint shiver down Marjorie's spine, and she glanced almost pleadingly at her companion.

"What——?" she began, then stopped. "Where shall we go?"

"Suppose we walk around the White Lot," he suggested, after a moment's thought. "We're not likely to be interrupted there," turning to bow to some friends.

"Very well," agreed Marjorie briefly, quickening her pace, and talking of indifferent subjects they made their way up busy F Street, across Fifteenth, back of the Treasury, and round to the Elipse. Barnard pointed to one of the empty benches which stood on the outer edge of the huge circle of well-kept turf, and Marjorie followed him to it.

"Well, what is your news?" she demanded, after waiting for him to speak.

"You are so literal, Madge," he said, with a half sigh. "Give a poor beggar a chance to look at you; I'm reveling in having you to myself again."

But Marjorie drew away from him. "Your news, please; I know it's bad, or you would not hesitate to tell me."

"Have it your own way," Barnard thumped the turf nervously with his cane. "Do you know your aunt, Madame Yvonett, has a chattel mortgage with the Wellington Loan Company?"

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"Yes; she took it out during mother's last illness. How did you come to hear of it, Chichester?"

"The Wellington Company has turned the mortgage over to me to collect for them. I do their legal work, you know."

"No, I wasn't aware of it." Marjorie drew in her breath sharply. "The interest is not due until next week."

"But, my dearest girl, they want more than their interest—they require the principal."

"The company agreed to permit Aunt Yvonett to pay that off gradually."

"Has your aunt a written agreement to that effect?"

"I don't know positively, but Mr. Saunders always attends to that for her."

"Unfortunately Saunders is no longer president of the company, and the new head is a very different type of man. He insists on calling in all loans which have run for a considerable period."

"It's hateful of him!" Marjorie stamped with sudden fury. "Aunt Yvonett is trying so hard to pay off her debts, and she took this mortgage so that mother could have some comforts and proper care before she died. Oh, I can't let him foreclose!"

Unconscious of Barnard's intent gaze, she stared at the distant White House, picturesque in its setting; then with tired, restless eyes turned to look at the still more distant Washington Monument, whose tapering shaft seemed lost in fleecy clouds. She

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knew that hundreds of migrating birds nightly beat themselves to death against the towering marble shaft, a shaft as immovable as that Fate which was shaping her destiny.

"How much money does Aunt Yvonett owe the company?" she asked abruptly

Barnard consulted his note book. "The total sum is eleven hundred and forty-three dollars and seventeen cents."

Marjorie swallowed hard; the amount loomed even larger than the Washington Monument. Her first month's salary at the Fordyces' had gone to meet current expenses, and to buy Madame Yvonett a much needed gown. Where could she turn?

"I took over this business," continued Barnard, "because I feared another lawyer might give you trouble. Why not let me advance you the money, Madge?"

"No, never!" Barnard winced at the abrupt refusal, and observing his hurt expression, she added hastily, "Your offer was kindly meant, Chichester, and I thank you; but accepting your assistance is quite out of the question."

"I don't see why," quickly. "I worship the ground you walk on—Madge, darling, why must I give all, and you give nothing?"

"Nothing?" asked the girl drearily, and she closed her eyes to keep back the blinding tears. "Worship is not all a woman requires; there is honor and faith . . . "

"You doubt my sincerity?" he demanded hotly.

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"Can you blame me?" She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "Have I not daily evidence of your attentions to Janet Fordyce?"

Barnard threw back his head and laughed long and heartily. "Madge, are you quite blind?" he asked. "I am attentive to Janet, yes, because then I can be near you. Do you really suppose I care for that bread-and-butter miss?"

"Bread and butter's very good for a steady diet," Marjorie passed a nervous hand over her forehead. "Particularly when it's spread with gold dust."

"Steady, Madge, steady; there are some insults a man can't take from even a woman." Barnard's eyes were flashing ominously, and every bit of color had deserted his face. "Have you no spark of feeling about you? Are you all adamant? Have you no recollection of the night we plighted our troth?" his voice quivered with pent-up passion, and she moved uneasily.

"I am not the one who forgot, Chichester," she said, refusing to meet his eyes. "When I found—changed conditions, I gave you back your freedom."

"Because I had not been to see you for a couple of days. What a reason!" he laughed mirthlessly. "You accuse me of lack of faith; come, where was *your* faith?"

"It's the pot calling the kettle black;" Marjorie, intent on controlling her impulse to cry, failed to observe Barnard's altered demeanor. He had been intently studying the varying emotions which flitted across her face, and, keen student of human nature

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that he was, instantly put his knowledge of her character to the test.

"Come," he sprang to his feet. "We will go to Madame Yvonett . . . "

"What for?" in alarm, the recollection of the chattel mortgage returning to her.

"To ask her consent to our marriage."

Marjorie sat back in her seat. "Would you wed me, the beggar maid?"

"Within the hour, if you wish." He leaned nearer her, and his hot passionate words soothed her troubled heart, and finally dispelled her last lingering doubt. She gazed at him half shyly, never had he appeared to greater advantage, her chevalier "*sans peur et sans reproche*." A piercing automobile siren brought her back from her day-dream.

"What time is it?" she asked in some alarm.

Barnard looked at his watch. "Twenty minutes of one."

"Then we can just do it," and snatching up her chain bag, she led the way to Pennsylvania Avenue.

"Are we going to Madame Yvonett's?" he asked tenderly.

"Not now." Her eyes smiled wistfully back into his.

"Madge, won't you marry me?" stopping directly in front of her.

"Not just yet." Marjorie only saw the bitter disappointment in the fine eyes regarding her so wistfully; she never caught the significance of his long-drawn sigh of relief. "I have some pride,

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Chichester. Let me first get clear of my debts, and then we'll talk of marriage."

"Won't you let me help you with that chattel mortgage?" pleaded Barnard.

"No," gently. "I shall write to some friends in New York—here comes our car, Chichester, do hurry."

So intent were they on catching the car that neither noticed a well-dressed young woman watching them from a bench in Lafayette Square. Nurse Allen grew white to the lips and her pretty eyes glittered with a more powerful emotion than tears as she observed Barnard's tender solicitude for Marjorie as he escorted her across the street.

"Still playing the old game," she muttered, tossing a handful of peanuts to three park squirrels, and gathering up her bag and muff she turned her footsteps toward Admiral Lawrence's house.

On their arrival at the Fordyce residence Barnard was ushered into the sunny library by the footman, while Marjorie hastily sought her room. Barnard found Janet and her brother waiting for him.

"I hope I'm not late," he said, selecting a seat near Janet, who resumed work on the necktie she was crocheting.

"You are just on time," remarked Duncan. "Mother is the tardy member of the household—and Miss Langdon."

"Marjorie is usually prompt," Janet gave a tug at her spool of silk; the work-basket overturned, and its contents scattered in all directions. "Oh, don't

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trouble," as the two men stooped to gather up the different articles.

"What's this, Janet?" asked Duncan, picking up a heavy gold object which had rolled toward him. Barnard's eyes dilated, and he shot a swift look at Janet.

"A ring," she replied. "A gold signet ring."

"So it seems." Duncan examined it with care. "A man's ring?" raising gravely questioning eyes to his sister's.

"And made to fit a girl's finger." Janet took it from him, and slipped it on, "but too large for me."

"Take it off," commanded Barnard in her ear as the library door opened, but she shook her head violently and turned to the newcomer.

"Look, Marjorie," she called audaciously, displaying the ring on her finger "Treasure trove."

Recognizing the familiar ring, Marjorie's heart lost a beat, then raced onward, as she said clearly:

"To have and to hold, Janet," and Barnard's eyes shifted before the scorn in hers.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ONLY WOMAN

ALMOST the amount," mused Marjorie folding the letter and placing it carefully away in the top drawer of her bureau. "The company will have to take it and wait for the remainder. I can do no more," and she turned dejectedly in her chair and surveyed her room, the dainty furnishings of which left nothing to be desired in point of taste and comfort. Mrs. Fordyce had given Marjorie the large double room on the second bedroom floor, and adjoining Janet's, the two girls using the communicating dressing-room.

The past few days had sorely taxed Marjorie's composure and endurance. Besides her worry over money matters, her awakening to Chichester Barnard's duplicity had shocked her beyond measure. The disillusion had been complete. Barnard was but a common fortune hunter; Janet his quarry, and her paid chaperon only a plaything to amuse his idle hours. Marjorie burned with shame and indignation at his daring to hold her so cheaply. What had she done that he should have so poor an opinion of her intelligence and integrity as to believe she should tamely submit to being made a

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cat's-paw? The thought scorched her like a white-hot iron. She saw Barnard with new eyes; he was undeniably handsome, entirely selfish, plausible—ah, too plausible; it had been his charm of manner and fascinating personality which had held her captive for so long, and quieted her haunting doubts of his sincerity.

She felt it to be her duty to warn Mrs. Fordyce of Barnard's true character, but hesitated, fearing her motive might be misconstrued. Janet would undoubtedly declare her interference sprang from jealousy. It was obvious that the young girl was flattered by Barnard's attention, and Marjorie reasoned that opposition would but fan her liking into an impetuous espousing of his cause, and that might lead to the very thing Marjorie most heartily wished avoided. During wakeful nights she decided to temporize; to quietly undermine whatever influence Barnard had gained over Janet's impressionable nature, and to see that his friendly footing in the household was discontinued. But it was uphill work, for Barnard had ingratiated himself with every member of the family, except Duncan, and Marjorie had sought her room after luncheon thoroughly discouraged. A tap at the door disturbed her, and on opening it, she found Mrs. Fordyce's maid standing in the hall.

"Mrs. Fordyce would like to have you stop in her boudoir, Miss Marjorie, before you go out," she said respectfully.

"Tell Mrs. Fordyce I will come at once, Blanche,"

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and pausing long enough to get her coat and furs, she ran down to the first bedroom floor and entered the boudoir. With a word of apology, she passed Calderon Fordyce, and sat down on the lounge by his wife.

"Father's on the rampage," announced Janet, uncurling herself in the depths of a large chair. "He pretends to be awfully shocked at the Calhoun-Cooper dinner last night."

"There's no pretense about it," fumed Fordyce. "Why I was invited is beyond me . . ."

"I suppose they thought they couldn't ask me without you," broke in Janet. "Duncan hasn't been decently civil to Joe, and Marjorie wasn't invited either."

"If you had followed Marjorie's advice you would not have accepted the invitation, Calderon," said Mrs. Fordyce mildly. "Were the Coopers so very *outré*?"

"Oh, the Coopers themselves weren't bad," admitted Fordyce.

"You seemed to get on beautifully with Pauline during dinner," protested Janet.

"How was she dressed?" asked Mrs. Fordyce, whose busy mind was taken up with replenishing Janet's wardrobe.

"I don't know, I didn't glance under the table," growled Fordyce.

"I hear Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper and Pauline are called 'High-Lo,'" added Janet, winking mischievously at Marjorie.

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"And who is 'Jack in the game'?" demanded Fordyce.

"Her latest admirer," retorted his daughter, flipantly.

"What roused your ire at the dinner?" demanded Mrs. Fordyce, bestowing a frown on Janet.

"Janet's contemporaries made up the guests, Judge and Mrs. Walbridge and I being thrown in for good measure," smiled Fordyce. "Left more or less to myself I watched the arrival of the young people, and I give you my word, Flora, the main endeavor of each guest appeared to be how to enter the drawing-room without greeting their host and hostess—and most of them succeeded in their purpose. I have seen better manners in a lumber camp."

"What would the older generation do if they didn't have us to criticize?" asked Janet, raising her hands in mock horror.

"Let me tell you, young lady, if I catch you forgetting the manners your mother taught you, I'll pack you off to a convent," warned Fordyce.

"You needn't get so awfully excited," objected his daughter, looking a trifle subdued. "I'm sure some of the married people are just as rude."

"The more shame to them; they are old enough to know better," declared Fordyce. "Life is too short to bother with ill-bred and stupid people. I came to Washington to avoid them."

"Pray, who sent you here?" inquired Marjorie.

"I thought a friend," Fordyce's eyes twinkled.

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"Now I've mingled in Capital society, I'm beginning to believe that my friend had a perverted sense of humor."

"You are too harsh in your judgment, Calderon," put in Mrs. Fordyce. "Rudeness we have with us everywhere, whereas in Washington, while there are numerous *nouveaux riches* seeking social recognition, who think lack of manners shows *savoir faire*, there are also many distinguished men and women spending the winter here. In addition the resident circle is certainly most charming and cultivated. The people who strive for vulgar ostentatious display are grafted from other cities."

"I have no desire to be put in that class," remarked Fordyce. "So, Janet, mind your p's and q's."

Janet rose abruptly. "Nuff said, Daddy. Are you going downtown, Marjorie?"

"Yes. Did you wish to see me, Mrs. Fordyce?"

"I will be greatly obliged if you will stop at Galt's, Marjorie, and order the articles I had put aside yesterday, sent to me; then please stop at Small's . . ."

"I think I'll go with you," volunteered Janet.

"Hurry then," Fordyce darted an impatient look at the mantel clock. "Two thirty-five. I'll send you both down in the motor, and you can stop at the bank, Janet, and draw a check for me. I'll go and make it out; come to the library before you go," and he left the room, followed by Janet.

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"Are you happy here, Marjorie?" asked Mrs. Fordyce, turning directly to the girl.

"What a question, dear Mrs. Fordyce! You have done everything for my comfort," and Marjorie looked gratefully at the older woman. "I have seldom met with such consideration and kindness. You—you are not dissatisfied with me?" in quick alarm.

"No, indeed." Mrs. Fordyce's tone was flattering in its sincerity, and Marjorie's fears were allayed. "I can't get on without you; in fact, I am afraid I'm putting too much upon you. You are so dependable I forget your youth."

Marjorie's laugh was followed by an unconscious sigh. "Youth with me is a thing of the past; I rival Methuselah," she said lightly. "Don't worry about me, dear Mrs. Fordyce; I can never do enough to repay your kindness. My work here is most congenial."

"Come along, Marjorie," called Janet from the hall.

"Go, my dear," Mrs. Fordyce impulsively kissed Marjorie. "Don't keep my husband waiting; he'll never forgive you."

Mrs. Fordyce had been by herself but a scant ten minutes when the hall door again opened and Duncan walked in.

"Where's everybody?" he demanded, seating himself by her.

"Your father had an engagement at the Riding and Hunt Club." She inspected the clock. "He should be there now."

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"And what are the others doing?"

"Janet and Marjorie? Oh, they are out shopping for Christmas."

"I wish I'd known it, I'd have gone with them," and he beat an impatient tattoo on the back of the lounge.

"I am afraid you find Washington very dull," said Mrs. Fordyce regretfully. "But I am selfish enough to wish to keep you here. Stay as long as you can, dear."

"Of course I'm going to stay," heartily, catching the wistful appeal in her eyes. "I've given up returning to the West until February and you'll have me on your hands until then."

"That's dear of you, Duncan," she leaned over and stroked his hand. "My bonnie big boy," and there was infinite pride in her tone. "You have no idea of my joy in having your father, Janet, and you under one roof again. This will be a blessed Christmas to me."

She sat silent as memories of lonely years in their San Francisco home rose before her. Originally from Boston, she had married Calderon Fordyce in New York, and had accompanied him to the Pacific coast where he had eventually built up an immense importing trade. His business had taken him frequently to the Orient, and Mrs. Fordyce after her railroad accident had perforce remained in San Francisco. She had not minded her husband's absences so much while her children were young, but when Duncan departed to college, and later Janet to board-

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ing school, her loneliness and physical condition had preyed so much on her mind that her husband had become alarmed. On consulting their physician, Calderon Fordyce had been advised to see that his wife had more distractions, and placing his business affairs in competent hands, he and Mrs. Fordyce had spent the past few years traveling in Europe, and while there she had formed the plan to introduce Janet to Washington society on her reaching her eighteenth year.

"I am particularly glad for Janet's sake that you are here, Duncan," she said presently. "It is nice for her to have a big elder brother at dances and dinners."

"Miss Langdon takes such excellent care of Janet that my services as cavalier are not required," replied Duncan lazily. "Janet is pretty enough to have plenty of partners, and Miss Langdon sees that she meets men."

"I think I was very lucky to secure Marjorie," and Mrs. Fordyce nodded her head complacently.

"I think you were," agreed Duncan, idly turning the leaves of a magazine. "I'm afraid Janet is tiring her out."

"What do you mean?"

"Too many late parties," tersely. "Miss Langdon is fagged out."

"She doesn't look strong," admitted Mrs. Fordyce thoughtfully. "But I think her pale cheeks and dlistrait manner are induced by a love affair."

"Eh!" Duncan turned toward his mother with

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unusual sharpness. "Who's the man?" The question seemed almost forced from him.

"Chichester Barnard."

"Oh, nonsense."

"It is not nonsense," replied Mrs. Fordyce, somewhat nettled by his manner. "I have watched them very closely when they are together, and I am sure I am right." Duncan rose abruptly and walked over to the window. "Mr. Barnard and Marjorie are both so good looking that they would make an ideal couple."

"Ideal?" Duncan's laugh was mirthless. "You are an idealist, mother."

"Better that than an image breaker," retorted Mrs. Fordyce. "Now, run along, dear, I must take my usual afternoon nap."

"All right, mother, I'll be down in the billiard-room if you should want me."

Duncan spent an unsatisfactory hour knocking the balls around, then took refuge in the library. Selecting a novel he made himself comfortable before the open fire, and commenced reading. But his attention wandered from the printed page; before him constantly was Marjorie Langdon's face. Surely he had not found his ideal but to lose her? He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror over the fireplace, and his mouth set grimly. What chance had his plain features and taciturn manner against Barnard's handsome face and gay debonair personality? He had inherited his looks and his temperament from some dour Scotch ancestor. It

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would take a miracle to make him a parlor knight. His book fell with a thud to the floor, and as he stooped to pick it up, the door opened and Marjorie walked in.

"Can I see your father?" she asked.

"I am sorry, he is not in," Duncan sprang up and pushed forward a chair. "Won't I serve the purpose?"

"Oh, yes." She stepped forward and removed a small roll of bank notes from her muff. "Janet cashed one hundred and fifty dollars for your father, and asked me to give it to him. Will you see that the money reaches him?" placing the bank notes on the library table. "I'm afraid I can't sit down, Mr. Fordyce; your sister is waiting for me."

"Let her wait," calmly. "It's beastly cold outside; I am sure the fire will be a comfort. Sit down for a moment."

"I mustn't," Marjorie's color, made brilliant by the wind outside, deepened to a warmer tint as she caught his eyes. "Janet and Baron von Valkenberg are waiting in the motor for me; we are going down to the Basin to skate. The river is frozen over, you know. Good-bye," and she vanished through the doorway.

"D—mn! they might have asked me to go along!" Duncan threw a fresh log on the fire as a slight vent to his feelings, then strolled over to the window opening on Sheridan Circle. He was just in time to see Marjorie assisted into the waiting motor by Chichester Barnard.

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Duncan drew back, stung to the quick, and making his way to the table, dropped into his father's revolving chair. For a time he sat blindly scratching marks on a pad, then threw down his pencil in disgust.

"The only woman!" he muttered, and his clenched hands parted slowly. As he rose to leave the room his eyes fell on a small pile of bank notes lying on the floor where he had knocked them some minutes before. He gathered them up, and paused idly to count the bills. . . . "Nine tens, ten tens, one hundred; one ten——" his hand remained suspended in the air; surely Marjorie had mentioned one hundred and fifty dollars? Where was the odd forty? He went slowly over the bills again, with the same result—one hundred and ten dollars.

With infinite pains Duncan searched the table and then the floor. Leaving the library he went carefully down the hall and staircase, and from there to the front door and down to the street. Finding no trace of any bank notes, he retraced his steps to the house, but instead of mounting the stairs he went up in the lift, first carefully examining its interior. On reaching the drawing-room floor he returned to the library and sat for some time contemplating the fire. The tinkle of the telephone bell aroused him, and he hastened to remove the receiver.

"Yes, this is Duncan Fordyce," he called. "Yes, Janet, what is it?"

"I can't rent a pair of skates here that will fit me," came Janet's answer. "Please have Blanche

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hunt in my closet and find my own pair, and send them down to me by messenger at once, Duncan."

"I'll attend to it," he promised. "Wait, Janet. Did you draw out some money for father?"

"Yes, a hundred and fifty dollars. Marjorie said she gave it to you. What did you say, Duncan?"

"Nothing. I'll send the skates. Good-bye," and he banged up the receiver. But it was some minutes before he moved, and when he rose there were lines about his mouth which had not been there before. He pushed the electric bell, and on Perkins' entrance, gave him full instructions regarding the skates. As the butler left the room, Calderon Fordyce appeared.

"All alone, Duncan?" he asked. "Where's Janet?"

"Down skating on the Potomac."

"Deuce take the girl! What does she mean by gadding about? I told her to return here at once with my money. I promised to advance Perkins' wages, and——"

"Janet left it with me," Duncan stepped forward and handed his father the roll of bills. "Here it is."

"Thanks, Duncan," Fordyce took out his leather wallet and stuffed the bank notes inside it.

"Hold on," cautioned Duncan. "Hadn't you better count your money?"

Fordyce eyed his son in astonishment. "What are you driving at?" he demanded brusquely. "I'm not in the habit of questioning anything you and Janet give me."

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"Some of that money is missing," stated Duncan.

"What?" Fordyce's smile vanished, and his eyes darkened.

"I borrowed forty dollars," added Duncan tranquilly. "Here's my check for the amount," taking it up from the table. "I needed the ready money, so"—smiling whimsically, "helped myself."

CHAPTER IX

GAY DECEIVERS

MRS. CALHOUN-COOPER contemplated her daughter with distinct admiration, albeit mixed with some alarm.

"My dear Pauline," she said, lowering her lorgnette. "I have seldom seen you look so well, but—eh—don't you think your gown is a trifle too—too pronounced?"

"Of course it isn't." Pauline revolved slowly, the better to show the expensive Paquin model which she was wearing. "Nothing is extreme these days; I mean everything is extreme."

"Hello, why the beauty show?" demanded Joe from the doorway of the library.

"Joseph! You are not in evening clothes!" wailed his mother. "And Pauline is waiting for you to take her to the Walbridge dance."

"I forgot the beastly thing," grumbled Joe, sauntering over to a chair. "I've been so busy today."

"Same old business, Joe?" questioned Pauline significantly, scanning his rumpled appearance with no kindly eye. "Really, father will be deeply interested to hear you are so engrossed in the pursuit of pleasure."

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"Cut it out," admonished her brother roughly. "I've stood all I'm going to from you."

"Stop this bickering, instantly," commanded Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper. "And you, Joseph, go upstairs at once and change your clothes. If you don't," meeting the mutinous glare with which he favored her, "I shall telephone at once to the Capitol and report your conduct to your father. You know what *that* means," with marked emphasis.

Joe knew only too well. Spoiled and indulged by a silly mother, bullied by Pauline, the only person he held in wholesome awe was his father. Some of his indiscretions had been exploited in the newspapers, and before coming to Washington, his father had laid down a cast-iron rule for him to follow in the future. Joe moved uneasily in his chair.

"There's no occasion for you and Pauline to get excited," he protested. "It won't take me ten minutes to shift into my dress suit."

"Take time enough to make yourself presentable," cautioned Pauline. "I'm particular as to the appearance of my escorts."

"One wouldn't guess it, judging from the men you have hanging around," sneered Joe, wrath overcoming discretion.

"That will do," Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper stamped her foot. "Joseph, go at once to your room; the car is already waiting for you and Pauline."

Muttering uncomplimentary remarks under his breath, Joe started for the door. Passing his father's desk his eyes fell on a pile of apparently

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unopened letters awaiting Representative Calhoun-Cooper's return from the Capitol where he had been detained since noon. Recognizing the handwriting on the topmost envelope, Joe's flushed face paled, and a slight shiver ran down his back. Pauline, intent on arranging a corsage bouquet, paid no further attention to her brother, and Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper was equally absorbed in watching her. Joe paused a moment in indecision; then leaned over and palmed the letter with neatness and dispatch.

Judge and Mrs. Erastus Walbridge's handsome residence was *en fête* when Pauline and Joe finally put in an appearance. The spacious rooms and hallways, festooned with Southern smilax in which were twined tiny iridescent electric lights, and hung with holly, mistletoe, and poinsettia, resembled fairyland. Mrs. Walbridge's Christmas Eve dances had become a time-honored institution, and invitations to them were eagerly sought. She insisted that her guests should arrive at half-past nine and depart at two o'clock; such early dancing hours being kept at no other house in the National Capital. As she always provided the best of music and the most delicious of suppers, society invariably abided by her rulings, although sometimes enjoying a hearty laugh behind her back.

Pauline did not linger in the dressing-room. Taking her cloak check, she hastened into the ballroom followed by Joe, who presented a remarkably immaculate appearance considering the short time consumed in changing his clothes. Mrs. Walbridge,

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conscious that the hour was getting late, received them with some stiffness, but Pauline's profuse apologies for their tardy arrival caused her to unbend.

"I think you already know Baron von Valkenberg," she said, as the diplomat joined them, and in a second more Pauline was dancing with him.

Joe, left to himself, for Mrs. Walbridge's attention was instantly claimed by an older guest, saw Marjorie Langdon standing talking to several friends and crossed the room to speak to her. He did not share his family's antipathy for Marjorie. It took him several moments to dodge the dancers as he progressed across the floor, and just as he reached Marjorie's side Chichester Barnard came up.

"No you don't, Barnard," he exclaimed. "First come, first served. My dance, Miss Langdon?"

"I beg your pardon, I have a prior claim," protested Barnard.

"Quite wrong," smiled Marjorie. "I am promised to nobody for this dance."

"Then I'm Johnny on the spot," chimed in Joe, triumphantly. "Come," and placing his arm about Marjorie's waist, the two danced down the room.

Refusing to meet the eyes of several wallflowers who were looking hopefully in his direction, Barnard idly watched the gay throng, as the waxed floor swayed under the tread of flying feet.

"The popular Mr. Barnard not dancing!" ex-

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claimed a voice over his shoulder, and turning he found Pauline standing at his elbow.

"I was looking for you," he answered readily, "but I thought I saw you with von Valkenberg . . ."

"He was sent for to go to the telephone," she pouted prettily, "and had to excuse himself."

"Let me take his place," and clasping her hand they joined the dancers. When the music stopped Barnard secured a glass of punch for his partner and himself, and they strolled about, at last going into what Mrs. Walbridge called her "tea-room."

"Isn't that Joe and Miss Langdon sitting over there?" questioned Pauline, indicating a deep window recess partly screened from the general view by tall palms.

"Yes."

"Suppose we join them," paying no attention to the shortness of his tone. "Joe is so susceptible to pretty women, and Miss Langdon is more than pretty. How does she get on with Mrs. Fordyce?"

"Very well, I believe."

"Then she must have a remarkable disposition, for I am told that Mrs. Fordyce's peculiarities make her difficult to live with," responded Pauline. "A friend of mother's acted as her companion in San Francisco while Janet was at boarding-school, and she said Mrs. Fordyce's curious . . ." she broke off abruptly. "Good evening, Miss Langdon," sweetly. "I am afraid I shall have to carry off my brother," slipping her arm inside his as he rose at her approach. Joe's face darkened, and he raged

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inwardly. It was like Pauline to spoil his fun and make him appear ridiculous.

"Be satisfied with Mr. Barnard, sister mine," he said coolly. "I am having a very good time where I am."

"I have no doubt of that," Pauline's voice was venomous under its honey sweetness. "But do think of poor Miss Langdon! There are two débutantes anxious to meet you, dear, so come; Miss Langdon will excuse us."

"Oh, certainly," Marjorie allowed a faint hint of her secret amusement to creep into her charmingly modulated voice. "I quite understand. Shall I keep a dance for you later, Mr. Cooper?" purposely omitting the "Calhoun."

"Well, rather; two at the very least," pleaded Joe. "Do, Miss Langdon, I'll be right back."

"Coming, Mr. Barnard?" inquired Pauline, then bit her lip as he shook his head.

"I have the next dance with Miss Langdon, so of course——" a courteous bow completed his sentence, and Pauline turned abruptly on her heel and left them.

"A curious pair," commented Barnard. "Cooper appears completely under his sister's thumb."

"She has the stronger personality."

"You put it politely," laughed Barnard. "Miss Calhoun-Cooper is a handsome vixen."

"A type you do not admire."

"I admire no type," smoothly. "Only one girl."

"Janet will be complimented."

GAY DECEIVERS

"I was not referring to Miss Janet . . ."

"Actions speak louder than words."

"Not when the wrong construction is put on them."

"Must we go over that again?" asked Marjorie wearily.

"Yes," vehemently. "On my word of honor I never gave that ring to Janet."

"What a liar you are, Chichester."

Barnard's hand closed over her wrist in a grip that made her wince. "By heaven! you must take that back."

For reply she shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. Her open scorn stung him. Freeing her wrist, he fumbled in his vest pocket, then drew out his signet ring and held it before her.

"Are you convinced, O Doubter?" he asked.

Marjorie shot a swift look at him, and then at the gold circlet in his hand. "How did you get it back?"

"By asking for it."

"On what grounds?"

"That I lost the ring the night of their first dinner dance."

Marjorie's scornful regard swept him from head to foot.

"Too flimsy," she commented. "I have been fooled by you once too often."

Between rage and passion Barnard's habitual self-control forsook him. Catching her hand he forcibly closed her fingers over the ring.

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"It's yours, yours—do you hear!"

"No, no," she retreated several steps from him, and he followed her, his face alight with passion.

"My own darling!"

But she struck down his encircling arm, and fled back into the drawing-room.

Pausing to regain her usual tranquil bearing, she discovered she had stopped beside Duncan Fordyce, and she drew back. During the past week an indefinable something in Duncan's manner, an aloofness, and a lack of the gentle deference he had first accorded her, had been noticeable. From seeing him frequently, she hardly saw him at all. She partly turned and studied him attentively. The dimple, almost a cleft, relieved his stubborn chin of some of its aggressiveness, and while he could never be called handsome, he carried the "hall mark," and his fine figure never showed to better advantage than in a dress suit, the crucial test offered to mankind by modern customs tailors. Involuntarily she contrasted him with Barnard, and admitted in her own mind, that the latter, as ingratiating and handsome as he was, suffered by the comparison. Her woman's intuition warned her that Duncan was a man to be trusted, while Barnard . . .

Tired of watching the dancers, Duncan swung around to leave the ballroom and almost collided with her.

"You here!" he exclaimed. "And I didn't know it." He pulled himself up, and his manner changed. "You must think me very rude, Miss Marjorie."

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"Oh, no, only absorbed," lightly, scanning the scene before her. "There's Janet dancing with Tom Nichols."

"As per usual," Duncan laughed outright. "Where are your eyes, Miss Chaperon?"

Marjorie reddened. "Upon my word, I look on Tom as a brother—I never thought . . ." her voice trailed off, and Duncan waited in vain for her to finish her sentence.

"Nichols is a good fellow," he said finally. "I like him. Shall we dance?"

The invitation was given in so perfunctory a tone that Marjorie's ears tingled. She checked the curt refusal on her lips, and instead accepted with a nonchalance which matched his own. He should pay for his indifference, pay dearly, she vowed to herself, and her alluring smile stirred his pulses. Like many big men he was extremely light on his feet, and Marjorie circled the room with him in complete enjoyment of the dance. Suddenly her strength deserted her, and she stumbled and leaned heavily on his arm.

"The heat," she murmured, as alarmed he bent toward her. "I will be better in the hall."

Shielding her from the other dancers, he helped her from the room. The cooler atmosphere outside revived her somewhat, and she was mumbling some words of apology into Duncan's anxious ear when Mrs. Walbridge hove in sight. Seeing the pair sitting on the stairs, she moved toward them as rapidly as her avoirdupois permitted. Quickly Duncan explained the situation to her.

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"You poor child," she said. "Go right upstairs to my bedroom and lie down. You will find a pitcher of ice water up there, or do you prefer a glass of champagne?" Marjorie replied in the negative. "Then go right up, my dear; I'll be along presently," and she moved toward the ballroom.

"Would you like me to go with you?" inquired Duncan anxiously. "Or shall I ring for a servant?"

"Neither, please. I know the house well, and I'll be all right after a short rest. You've been very kind," holding out her hand impulsively. He held it tightly in both his own for a second, then silently left her. She watched his tall form out of sight, and sighing started slowly upstairs.

"Well, Duncan, where have you been hiding?" asked Janet, meeting him on his return to the ballroom.

"Smoking," laconically. "Do you want to dance?"

"Of course I do," with uncompromising honesty. "You haven't been near me this evening."

"I saw you were plentifully supplied with partners," Duncan suited his step to Janet's. "Having a good time?"

"Oh, lovely," and Janet's animated face attested the fact. "Where's Marjorie?" They had reached the end of the room, and as they made the turn, a man left the group of stags and placed a detaining hand on Duncan's shoulder.

"Brother and sister dancing together," laughed Barnard. "This will never do. Split this number with me, Miss Janet?"

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"Perhaps I will," Janet hesitated. "It will serve you right, Duncan; you've neglected me shamefully . . ." waving a gay farewell she and Barnard disappeared in the crowd of dancers. Duncan, making his way to the smoking-room, encountered Pauline, and paused to talk with her.

Barnard, conversing as he danced, finally observed Pauline and Duncan sitting together. "Your brother had better resign himself to the inevitable; Miss Calhoun-Cooper has her talons on him," he laughed.

"You don't know Duncan," retorted Janet. "He has a will of his own . . ." An awkward couple cannonaded heavily against her . . . "Ouch!"

"Are you hurt?" questioned Barnard in alarm, as Janet came to an abrupt stop.

"I think that man has lamed me for life," she groaned. "His heel came down on my instep."

"The cow; he needs a ten-acre lot to dance in!" Barnard scowled at the receding couple. "Hadn't you better sit down, Janet?"

"Where?" and she glanced despairingly about.

"Come this way," pointing to the tea-room, and Janet limped after him to the window recess behind the palms, and settled herself comfortably on the wide cushioned window-seat. "You must be very tired, my dearest," glancing solicitously at her. "The penalty for being the belle of the ball."

"You shouldn't thrust honors upon me," she laughed.

"There's nothing too good for you," he whis-

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pered. "No wonder men adore you; you little darling"—she moved uneasily as his arm slipped around her waist. "Why won't you let me speak to your father?"

"Not yet," she stammered. "A little more time, Chichester——"

Barnard did not conceal his chagrin and disappointment. "So that you may receive attentions from other men?" he asked, his jealousy instantly aflame.

"You wrong me," Janet drew herself away with gentle dignity. "You, least of all, have no cause for jealousy. Only, Chichester, I must know my own mind before our engagement is announced."

"Have it your own way; I am wax in your hands," he said fondly.

"Hark! there goes the music," Janet studied her dance card. "It must be an extra."

"Good, we'll sit it out together," and he took her hand.

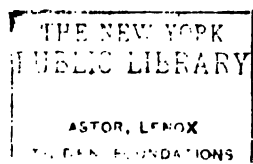
"To think tomorrow is Christmas," said Janet dreamily, a few minutes later. "Or is it midnight now?" Barnard pulled out his watch, and her attention was focused on the handsome seal that hung from the gold fob. "Let me see it, Chichester?"

He seemed not to hear her request. "Only eleven!" he exclaimed. "It must be later. I believe my watch has stopped. Can you hear any ticking?" raising it to her ear.

Upstairs in Mrs. Walbridge's sumptuously furnished bedroom Marjorie rested on the lounge in an



"She was about to call her by name, when Janet quietly took up a diamond sunburst."



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alcove. Only one electric light over the dressing-table was turned on, and the semi-darkness of the large room proved a welcome refuge from the glare and heat downstairs, and the deadly faintness which had almost overcome Marjorie, gradually disappeared. An occasional shiver shook her, and she groped about and pulled up the eiderdown quilt which lay folded at the foot of the lounge. Through the half-shut door strains of music came faintly, preventing her from dozing off, and she turned restlessly on her pillow. Suddenly conscious that her left hand was tightly clenched, she loosened her cramped fingers, and discovered that she still held Barnard's signet ring concealed in her rumpled handkerchief.

At that moment the hall door was pushed gently open, and a young girl came into the room. Without glancing into the shadows about her, she moved directly to the dressing-table and stood arranging her hair. As she halted under the full rays of the light, Marjorie recognized Janet. She was about to call her by name, when Janet quietly took up a diamond sunburst from the jewel-box on the dressing-table, and deliberately pinned it under the folds of lace on her bodice, then glided from the room as noiselessly as she had entered.

Petrified with astonishment Marjorie, hardly able to believe the evidence of her senses, remained on the lounge for one long minute; then collecting her wits, she flung the eiderdown quilt to the floor, slipped Barnard's ring inside her bodice, and stole from the room. She found Janet standing on the outskirts of

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the large circle of guests surrounding a Santa Claus, who was distributing gifts from his sack and a beautifully decorated tree which had been carried into the center of the ballroom.

"See, Marjorie," exclaimed Janet, turning at her touch. "Doesn't the little man make an adorable Santa?"

"Who is he?" Marjorie wedged herself a little closer to Janet's side.

"I don't know; some professional probably. What's he giving to Captain Nichols?" peering intently down the room.

Quickly Marjorie seized her opportunity. Her fingers deftly felt among the laces on Janet's gown, unfastened the sunburst, and, concealing the diamond pin in her handkerchief, she fled swiftly upstairs again. On turning the knob of Mrs. Walbridge's bedroom door she found it locked, and startled, leaned trembling against the panels. How was she to replace the sunburst in the jewel-box if she could not gain admission to the room?

"My pin, please," said a cold voice from behind her, and wheeling, she confronted Mrs. Walbridge. Mechanically Marjorie displayed the sunburst.

"How——?" her voice died in her throat.

"I came up to inquire how you were; found my jewel-box standing open, the sunburst missing, you gone——" Mrs. Walbridge shrugged her ponderous shoulders. "I locked my door to prevent a recurrence of——" she broke off on meeting Marjorie's uncomprehending stare, and her harsh voice soft-

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ened. "My affection for your aunt, Madame Yvonett, seals my lips, but I shall not receive you again—good-night."

Taking the sunburst from Marjorie's nerveless hand, she secured it in her gown and returned to her guests, while slowly her meaning thrust itself on the bewildered, frightened girl. Marjorie watched Mrs. Walbridge in dumb agony; then made a hasty step forward as the older woman reached the head of the staircase. But a thought stayed her: if she told the truth she would expose Janet.

Mrs. Walbridge had disappeared inside the ballroom when Marjorie, clinging tightly to the banisters for support, made her slow way down the staircase. She paused an instant on the bottom landing. From the ballroom came a burst of laughter and round after round of applause, and Santa Claus, his empty sack slung across his shoulders, and his cheeks redder than ever, bounded into the square hall. Before dashing out of the front door, which a footman held open, he turned on his gay pursuers, and raising his voice above the clamor, called:

"'A Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!'"

CHAPTER X

IN THE COLD, GRAY DAWN

CHICHESTER BARNARD slipped off his evening coat and put on his smoking-jacket, and pausing in front of his chiffonier, gazed hungrily at a photograph of Marjorie Langdon leaning against his shaving-glass. The edges were cut evenly, and to the most casual eye it was obvious that the picture had been taken from a large silver frame from whose center smiled a speaking likeness of Janet Fordyce. Barnard picked up Marjorie's photograph and studied it long and intently, and gradually the features assumed a life-like outline and the eyes a natural fire, so completely did her personality vitalize the inanimate photograph under his rapt attention. With a shudder he dropped it face downward.

"Ah! Madge, my darling," he murmured sadly. "Janet may occupy the silver frame, but not my heart. I am tempted, sorely tempted, but dollars and sense go together."

Catching up a box of cigarettes, he switched off the electric light, and entering his sitting-room, made his way to the fireplace where fresh logs were burning merrily on the hearth. He pulled up a Morris

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chair and warmed his hands at the blaze; then settled back and stared at his surroundings.

Barnard had inherited the Georgetown property on the death of his aunts, and, not having the means to keep up the fine old mansion, and finding it impossible to rent as a residence, he had had the building remodeled and made into an apartment house. He kept one of the bachelor apartments, comprising sitting-room, bedroom, and bath, for his own use. The two rooms were large and airy, and the handsome antique furniture, also an inheritance with the house, did not look amiss in their familiar setting.

Chichester Barnard was the last of a long line of distinguished ancestors, and from his earliest youth pride of family had been drilled into him, and the often repeated refrain, "A Barnard can do no wrong," became a fetish with him. He was as familiar with family tradition as he was ignorant of true democracy, but soon after attaining his majority he was forced to realize that past glory did not pay grocers' bills, and that his blue blood was not a useful commodity except in drawing-rooms. The pricking of his inflated family pride brought in its train a false value of money. With money what could he not accomplish? What not buy? And the acquisition of money became his lode-star.

By arduous work and much self-denial Barnard was winning a deserved reputation in his profession, but his impetuous temperament chafed at the slowness with which he accumulated money. He was

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constantly seeking unscrupulous get-rich-quick schemes and other short cuts to wealth, but with heart-breaking regularity they came to nothing. He had met Marjorie Langdon two years before and had fallen madly in love with her, had persuaded her to engage herself to him, and with a caution which he inwardly despised, had made her promise not to tell Madame Yvonett of their mutual attachment. He felt that if the engagement was once announced he would be irrevocably bound to marry her; he longed to marry her, but—he would not wed her while he was a poor man. He despised poverty as before he had despised low birth.

Exaggerated reports of Janet Fordyce's reputed wealth, which she was to inherit on coming of age, reached Barnard and aroused his cupidity. In the past his affection for Marjorie had barred that all too frequently traveled road to "Easy Street," a marriage for money; but he met Janet at a time when his finances were low, and the idea was not so distasteful as formerly; particularly when the girl, beside her wealth, had charm, youth, and a lovable disposition. But Barnard, like many another man, was tempted to play with fire. The more inevitable appeared his break with Marjorie, the more passionately he loved her, and only the lure of wealth kept him steadfast in his purpose.

Barnard was trying to pierce the future as he sat in his sitting-room, the cold, gray dawn creeping through the window blinds, and he smoked innumerable cigarettes with nervous rapidity. His roving

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eyes restlessly examining each familiar piece of furniture, finally lighted on the huge antique sofa near by. Instead of having legs, the base of the sofa was a carved sphinx, a sadly battered sphinx, whose two breasts had been cut off because Barnard's spinster aunts had deemed them immodest!

Just as Barnard lighted another cigarette, a man, lying on the sofa, rolled over and viewed him in stupid wonder.

"Feeling better, Cooper?" inquired Barnard politely.

"How'd I get here?" asked Joe, ignoring the other's question. "And where am I, anyhow?"

"These are my diggings, and I brought you over here because you were so hopelessly pickled I judged your sister had better be spared a glimpse of you."

Slowly memory of the night returned to Joe's befuddled brain, and he sat bolt upright.

"Washington isn't so slow," he volunteered, after due reflection.

"There are plenty of people to help you go to the devil, here as elsewhere," retorted Barnard. "Better pull up, Cooper, it doesn't pay."

"Nothing pays," Joe growled disconsolately. "D—mn it, man, I don't want to listen to a temperance lecture," and he rose a trifle unsteadily.

"Sit down, Cooper," Barnard scanned him contemptuously, and Joe sulkily resumed his seat. "I've said my say."

"Lot's of snobs here," commented Joe, after nurs-

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ing his grievances in silence for some time. "Take Duncan Fordyce, for instance; turned me down this evening when I asked to be introduced to a girl he was dancing with. I'll get even with him, never fear."

Barnard ran an appraising eye over his companion, and a mental picture of Duncan brought a smile to his lips. "Don't try any hanky-panky business with Fordyce," he advised. "He might knock you into the other world."

"I'm not such a fool as to try physical force; but there are other ways of getting even," Joe frowned, then winked. "I know a thing or two about the Fordyce family."

Barnard blew ring after ring of smoke into the air and watched it evaporate with idle attention.

"Go carefully, Cooper," he cautioned. "Damages for slander are heavy."

"It's no slander, but gospel truth," affirmed Joe. "I had it straight from mother's friend, Mrs. Watson, who was companion to Mrs. Fordyce before they went abroad, and I know it's true by the way Duncan Fordyce acted when he heard me allude to the kink in his family," and in a few words he described the scene in the Turkish Bath.

"That explains Fordyce's lack of cordiality at Captain Nichol's quarters after the drill," commented Barnard. "If I were you, Cooper, I'd steer clear of arousing his wrath."

"He can't injure me," Joe swaggered with the courage induced by overindulgence. "And you've

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been mighty white this evening; it's only right I should tip you off."

"Keep your confidences to yourself," Barnard rose and kicked the fire into a brighter blaze. "The matter does not concern me."

"Doesn't it, eh? Well, if I was planning to marry a girl, an' I heard her family were dotty——" he stopped and shrank back as Barnard swung on him.

"What do you mean by your damnable insinuation?" he demanded, his eyes flashing with indignation.

"'Tisn't a 'sinuation; it's—it's gospel truth I'm telling you," stuttered Joe, retreating to the farther end of the sofa. "Take your hand off my collar. Anybody in San Francisco 'll tell you the Fordyces are all crazy."

"You've said too much, and too little," Barnard slowly returned to his chair. "Go ahead and make good your statement, if you can," significantly. "And I warn you if I catch you lying, I won't leave it to Duncan Fordyce to finish you off."

"Nice way to talk to a friend who wants to do you a good turn," whined Joe. "You can prove what I say by writing to Mrs. Watson at Santa Barbara. She says whenever any member of the Fordyce family dies the physicians have to cauterize them—what do you make of that?" triumphantly.

"Only a precautionary measure to test death," said Barnard calmly. "I suppose the Fordyces have a dread of being buried alive."

"That applies to their mental condition——"

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Barnard shook his head in utter disbelief, and Joe continued heatedly. "I tell you they are unbalanced; why the old lady, Mrs. Fordyce——"

"Is a hunchback, yes," admitted Barnard. "She was injured in a railroad accident—that has nothing to do with mental trouble."

"I've been told that injury to the spine does often affect the brain," Joe stuck obstinately to his contention. "Anyway Mrs. Fordyce developed a mighty funny craze about dirt."

"Dirt?" Barnard's attention was fully aroused. "Do you mean she has mysophobia?"

"Maybe that's the word; what does it mean exactly?"

"Mysophobia? A morbid fear of contamination—of soiling one's hands by touching anything . . ."

"That's it!" exclaimed Joe. "Mrs. Fordyce has a bad case of it. Mrs. Watson said she insisted on washing her plates, knives, and forks before eating; and she gave up traveling because of the dirt and dust which nearly drove her mad, and just shut herself up."

"Poor soul!" ejaculated Barnard compassionately. "She must be in perpetual torment."

"She's tormented other people as well," said Joe. "She grew so that she wouldn't touch money; and once she gave away a soiled dollar bill to a beggar to get rid of it, then nearly had brain fever because she imagined she had passed on some disease to innocent people. I believe Calderon Fordyce spent a hundred just to trace that one dollar bill to have it

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returned to the United States Treasury and redeemed, before his wife got over the worrying about her sinfulness in passing along dirty money. I wish she'd get rid of some of it in my direction."

"Dirt to dirt," Barnard's sneering tone was lost on Joe, who was busy searching his empty pockets. "There is nothing discreditable to the Fordyces in what you have told me, Cooper; quite to the contrary. And while Mrs. Fordyce suffers from a curious mania, possibly superinduced by her accident, she is not mentally unbalanced, and most certainly her condition will not be inherited by her children. Janet told me she and Duncan were born before the accident."

"They may not inherit that particular craze," acknowledged Joe. "But I tell you, man, there is insanity in the family. There is some story about Janet; I don't know exactly what it is, but Pauline can tell you. She heard it from a schoolmate of Janet's——"

"And she heard it from someone else, and so on, and so on—bosh! utter bosh!" Barnard brought down his clenched fist on the table with a force that made the glasses ring. "If I hear you repeating this rot I'll make Washington too hot to hold you," and cowed by his blazing wrath, Joe mumbled a hasty promise.

Across Rock Creek the city lights were paling, and the cold gray dawn found Marjorie still crouching before the dying embers of a grate fire, where she

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had thrown herself on entering her bedroom some hours before. Slowly, very slowly her numbed senses grasped the significance of the occurrences of the night. Janet Fordyce was a kleptomaniac, and she, Marjorie Langdon, was branded a thief—caught with the goods! She shuddered in horror, and rubbed one cold hand over the other. Surely her God was a just God? Why was she picked out to be the victim of circumstance? First, Admiral Lawrence had believed her guilty of theft, and now Mrs. Walbridge had practically ordered her from her house as a thief. Of the theft of the codicil she could give no explanation, but she could at least clear herself of the charge of stealing the diamond sunburst by denouncing Janet.

Ah, but could she? Her dazed wits invariably returned to that point in her reasoning; was she not in honor bound to shield Janet? Mrs. Fordyce had taken her word in the face of her discharge from Admiral Lawrence's employ. Since being with Janet she had met with every courtesy and kindness, and Mrs. Fordyce had gone out of her way to make her feel at home. No, a thousand times no, she could never betray Janet.

Her decision reached, a feeling of relief swept over her, to be checked the next moment by the realization that even if she did denounce Janet she would not be believed. She was poor, she needed money, she had the opportunity, and she stole; so would read the verdict. Janet had but to ask, and a dozen diamond sunbursts, if need be, would be pur-

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chased to gratify her whim. She did not need to steal.

Marjorie rose slowly to her feet and stretched her stiff muscles, switched on the light, and then commenced to undress, but she gave little thought to what she was doing, her entire attention being taken up in trying to recall what she knew of kleptomania. She remembered being told that it was a mental derangement, an irresistible propensity to steal, and that the kleptomaniac cared nothing for the objects stolen as soon as the impulse to steal was gratified. Her father had once told her of a friend who would eat no food that was not stolen, and his servants (fortunately he was wealthy) had to secrete food about the house and permit him to steal it before he would satisfy his hunger. She had also read somewhere of a kleptomaniac so obsessed by his craze that he stole the crucifix from his confessor.

Merry, charming Janet to be the victim of such mental disorder! Marjorie wrung her hands in agony. Was there no way to help the child? If the news ever leaked out it would kill her delicate mother.

Marjorie, pleading her indisposition, had left Janet at the dance under Duncan's care, and a sympathetic footman having engaged a cab for her, she had returned at once to the Fordyce residence. Some hours later Janet had rapped at her door and asked how she was, and satisfied with Marjorie's answer, had gone straight to her room without en-

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tering, to Marjorie's intense relief; she would have broken down if she had faced her then.

Marjorie was about to get into bed when she spied a note addressed to her lying on top of a neat package on her bedstead. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, she tore open the envelope and listlessly read the few written lines; then, startled, read them a second and third time. The note was from her clergyman informing her that the contents of the accompanying package had been found the Sunday before in the Fordyce pew, and he thought it best to send them to her that she might return the property to the rightful owner.

The note slipped unheeded to the floor, and with trembling fingers she tore open the bundle, and out fell a dozen or more handsome silk and lace doilies. Not one was alike, and a cry of horror broke from Marjorie, as, picking them up, she recognized them as belonging to hostesses with whom she and Janet had recently lunched and dined.

CHAPTER XI

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

LAWRENCE. On Monday, December 24, Margaret A., beloved wife of Stephen Lawrence, Rear Admiral, U. S. N., aged sixty-two years. Funeral from her late residence on Wednesday at two o'clock. Interment at Arlington. Kindly omit flowers.

Chichester Barnard stared at the printed notice in the death column, then let the newspaper slip from his fingers to the floor. On looking up he caught the direct gaze of Duncan Fordyce, who had entered the smoking-room some time before, and was observing his changing countenance with some secret astonishment.

"Hello, Fordyce," Barnard pulled himself together. "Sorry I didn't see you before, but this confounded paper gave me a shock."

"No bad news I hope?" inquired Duncan, placing a stamp on the letter he took from his pocket.

"Just read the notice of my aunt's death," and as Duncan murmured some conventional condolences, he added, "Aunt Margaret was very decent to me, but since her second marriage, I've seen very little of her. She was really only my aunt by courtesy; her first husband having been my uncle, Diminty

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Barnard. Admiral Lawrence wasn't adverse to picking up a rich widow; I reckon he'll inherit a pot of money now. How is your sister today?"

"Rather tired after the Walbridge dance," Duncan yawned, then laughed. "Washington hours are too much for me. I don't see how the men here go out to entertainments and do their work."

"They try it for a couple of years, and then give up society, at least the dancing end of it. Has Miss Langdon recovered from her indisposition of last night?"

"She was down bright and early this morning," replied Duncan indifferently. "She appeared to be all right and in good spirits."

"That's fine. By the way, she will be sorry to hear of Mrs. Lawrence's death; she was the Admiral's secretary for several years."

"Indeed," Duncan yawned again. "Is Admiral Lawrence still on the active list?"

"Oh, no, he retired five or six years ago. Where are you going?" as Duncan rose.

"Haven't decided; think I'll stroll around the Speedway."

"Wait a moment and I'll go with you," volunteered Barnard, and Duncan halted uncertainly. "I must write a line to Admiral Lawrence and ask if there's anything I can do; it won't take me long." He was as good as his word, and after dispatching the hastily scrawled note by a messenger, he and Duncan left the Metropolitan Club and turned down Seventeenth Street.

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It was the first time that Duncan had had more than five minutes conversation alone with Barnard since their meeting, and he found him a far more agreeable companion than he had anticipated. Barnard, when he chose, was a brilliant talker, and his comments on the world in general and Washington in particular elicited amused chuckles from Duncan as they strolled along the picturesque driveway which skirts the Potomac River. But strive as he would, he could not drag Duncan out of his shell; every time he skillfully led the conversation to the Fordyces and their plans for the future, Duncan retired into his habitual reserve. Returning up Eleventh Street, Barnard paused at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue.

"You know Madame Yvonett, Miss Langdon's aunt, do you not?" he asked.

"No, I was not at home when she called on my mother."

"Then you have missed meeting one of the most charming characters in this city," exclaimed Barnard vigorously. "Come with me now and we'll stop in and wish the dear old lady merry Christmas."

But Duncan held back. "I am afraid I . . ."

"Oh, come along; we need only stay a moment. Your calling will gratify Madame Yvonett. I overheard her asking Miss Langdon to bring you to see her."

Duncan's indecision vanished. "Very well," he said, and the two men continued their walk up the Avenue to Thirteenth Street. They found the small

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house gay with Christmas wreaths, and a stiff and starched Minerva ushered them into Madame Yvonett's presence. Duncan's eyes brightened in keen appreciation as he bowed low before the stately Quakeress. In fichu and cap, tied with a dainty bow under her chin, and her soft gray silk, she looked the embodiment of beautiful old age.

"I am pleased to meet thee, Friend Fordyce," she said, giving him her hand. "Thy sister, Janet, has spoken of thee most often."

"I wanted to come before," Duncan drew up a chair near her, "but a great deal of my time has been taken up with business."

"Business!" echoed Barnard, genuinely surprised. "I took you for a gentleman of elegant leisure, didn't you, Marjorie?"

"Didn't I what?" inquired Marjorie, entering from the dining-room where she had been putting the finishing touches to the tea-table.

"Did you know our friend here," waving his hand toward Duncan, "is a hardy son of toil?"

Marjorie laughed. "Janet told me, Mr. Fordyce, that you have explored . . ."

"I have ambled about a bit," admitted Duncan hastily. "But I am not an explorer, only a lawyer."

"Indeed? I had no idea of it!" answered Marjorie. "Aunt Yvonett, the eggnog is ready."

"Will thee come, friend, and drink a kindly glass with me?" asked the Quakeress, laying her hand on Duncan's arm.

"Gladly," and he led her into the dining-room,

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and to her high-back chair. Barnard detained Marjorie as she was about to follow her aunt.

"Have you no word of greeting for me?" he pleaded, lowering his voice.

"Hush!" she cautioned. "Why did you bring Mr. Fordyce here?"

Barnard glanced at her flushed cheeks in some surprise. "We were walking together, and I suddenly hungered for a sight of you. I then recollected having heard you say that you were coming here to be with your aunt this afternoon, so I suggested dropping in."

"Tell me, Chichester, is that chattel mortgage all arranged?" she asked in an urgent whisper.

He nodded affirmatively, and her heart bounded with relief. "I'll bring you the papers; stay, on second thought you had better come to the office." He saw the shadow that crossed her face, and added reproachfully, "Am I so hateful to you?"

"That's a debatable question," she parried, avoiding his glance. By an effort he checked a bitter retort as she pulled back the portière, and, his face resuming its customary smiling mask, he followed her into the dining-room.

They found Madame Yvonett deep in conversation with Duncan.

"Thee sees we have friends in common," she announced, filling two glasses with the frothy beverage before her. "Help thyself to the sandwiches, Friend Barnard." In spite of Chichester Barnard's many attempts to ingratiate himself with the Quakeress,

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she had never dropped the formal address with him, although she had known his relatives for many years. "Where is thy Cousin Rebekah, Marjorie?"

"I 'specs dat's Miss Becky at de do' now," volunteered Minerva, emerging from the pantry as the bell sounded. "She done said she'd be back drickly."

"Ask her to come right in here," called Madame Yvonett. "Ah, Becky," seeing the spinster appear in the doorway. "Thee must be cold, come and have a glass of eggnog."

But Miss Rebekah declined the offer with some asperity; she considered eggnog the "devil's brew," and, but that a certain fear of Madame Yvonett's displeasure restrained her, would then and there have delivered a forceful homily on strong drink. She had met Chichester Barnard on previous visits, and was a staunch admirer of the handsome lawyer, whose resemblance to her hero, Byron, made a strong appeal to her latent sentimentality. He greeted her warmly, and after Duncan was introduced, placed a chair for her next his own.

"Where has thee been, Becky?" asked Madame Yvonett, turning back from giving directions to Minerva to bring the spinster a cup of weak tea.

"I ran over to ask Admiral Lawrence if there was anything I could do for him," explained Miss Rebekah. "Margaret Lawrence was my cousin, and being her only relative in Washington I thought it was the least I could do."

"Was she not related to thee, Friend Barnard?" inquired Madame Yvonett, turning to him.

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"I was only her nephew by marriage, but she was a good friend to me." The regret in his voice and manner rang true, even to Marjorie's watchful ears. "Mrs. Lawrence was a noble woman, and will be missed by many."

"She was very, very good to me," a lump rose in Marjorie's throat, and she hastily cleared her voice. "Did you learn any particulars of her death, Cousin Becky?"

"Yes, I saw the nurse." Miss Rebekah was in her element. She enjoyed nothing so much as the sound of her own voice, and particularly reveled in funereal topics; she attended her relatives' obsequies both near and far, and the more harrowing the circumstances surrounding their deaths, the more her soul thrilled in morbid enjoyment. "The nurse—what's her name, Marjorie?"

"Do you mean Kathryn Allen?"

"Yes, that's she; such a pretty girl," she interpolated. "Well, Nurse Allen told me that Cousin Margaret did not suffer toward the last; in fact, that during the past six weeks she never regained consciousness."

"Never regained consciousness," repeated Barnard slowly. "What a blessed relief."

"Yes, wasn't it," went on Miss Rebekah, addressing him directly. "I knew you would understand. Poor Cousin Margaret was in torment until she became delirious and later lapsed into a comatose condition. I saw Admiral Lawrence for a few minutes; he inquired particularly for you, Marjorie,

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and desired to know where you could be found quickly."

"Oh!" A faint, very faint inflection of fear in the monosyllable caught Duncan's quick ear, and he darted a keen look at Marjorie, but she was crumbling the end of her sandwich between her fingers, and he learned nothing from her blank expression.

"I suppose he wanted to get you to answer notes, and attend to things generally," continued Miss Rebekah, pouring out a cup of tea from the pot Minerva set before her. "I told the Admiral where you were, Marjorie, and how kind Mrs. Fordyce has been to you. I went quite into details," she smiled at Duncan. "I even mentioned some of the things Marjorie told me about you. . . ."

"Cousin Becky," Marjorie looked as angry as she felt. "You certainly are an——" catching her aunt's warning look, she held back the words "unmitigated nuisance" with which she had intended finishing her sentence.

"Well, my dear, I went into particulars because it took the Admiral's mind away from his sorrow," continued Miss Rebekah, her air of self-congratulation upon her tact causing Duncan to smile covertly. "And he was very interested in hearing all about your good fortune, Marjorie, and said he was sorry Mrs. Fordyce hadn't written him to ask about you——" Marjorie set down her egg-nog glass with a thud, she had drunk the delicious concoction at a gulp, and was grateful for the warmth which stole through her chilled body.

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"How is thy good mother?" asked Madame Yvonett, addressing Duncan. "I hoped that she would come in this afternoon and help me keep the Yuletide; thee sees, this is the only day I indulge in such dissipation," touching the punch bowl.

"If mother went anywhere, I know she would come to you, Madame Yvonett; but she insists on being a recluse." Barnard, conversing with Miss Rebekah, gave part of his attention to Duncan's remarks. Joe Calhoun-Cooper's confidences were fresh in his memory. "I wish you could induce mother to see more of her friends."

"It is not good for any of us to live within ourselves," acknowledged the gentle Quakeress. "A little natural diversion fits us for the ills of life. But thy mother lives so for others, she is never alone."

"You are right," answered Duncan heartily. "But of late years I have been so little with my family, I perhaps notice mother's withdrawal more than my father and sister."

"I wonder what has become of Janet," chimed in Marjorie, looking with some uneasiness at Duncan. "She said she would join me here at five o'clock."

"I left her reading in the library." Duncan looked at his watch. "It is after six."

"So late!" Barnard rose in some haste. "I am afraid I shall have to leave as I am dining with friends at Chevy Chase, and I have barely time to dress and get there. Madame Yvonett, it is always

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such a pleasure to see you; I hope you will let me come again soon."

"Thee is very welcome," responded Madame Yvonett kindly, and with a quick word of farewell to the others, Barnard took his departure.

As the front door banged shut, Marjorie lifted her furs and coat from the chair where she had thrown them. "I really must go," she said, and kissing her aunt affectionately, she whispered low, "don't let Cousin Becky torment the life out of you."

"Tut, child, she is one of my diversions," whispered back Madame Yvonett placidly. "Never take Becky seriously, nor any other troubles," glancing anxiously at the dark circles under Marjorie's eyes. "God guard thee in His Holy care," she murmured, and held Marjorie close, then pushed her gently from her. "Thee must not tarry. Friend Fordyce," as Duncan advanced to bid her good-night, "thy coming has given me much pleasure. . . ."

"May I come again?"

"Thee may indeed," with a cordiality that matched his eagerness. "Give this sprig of mistletoe," breaking off a piece from the small branch suspended from the newel post, "to thy mother with the season's greetings."

"Thank you," Duncan pocketed the tiny sprig with care, and shaking hands with Miss Rebekah, who hovered in the background, he returned to Marjorie's side. "Shall we walk or ride?" he asked, as the door closed behind them.

"Have we time to walk?"

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"Plenty," and with a strange, shy reluctance Marjorie accompanied him across Franklin Square and up Fourteenth Street to Massachusetts Avenue. "Where did you get your seven-league boots?" he asked, breaking the prolonged silence.

"One has to have them to keep up with you," she retorted.

"I beg your pardon," slacking his pace. "I did not realize——" he again relapsed into silence, and Marjorie's thoughts flew swiftly to Janet and the problems which confronted her.

After the discovery of the doilies she had spent the early hours of the morning trying to devise some plan to assist Janet; at all hazards the girl must be protected against her curious craze, but how—how? Madame Yvonné was the only one she could confide in, and she had gone there early that afternoon hoping to see her aunt alone, but old friends had called, and the time had passed without giving her an opportunity to ask her advice. A whisper of kleptomania, and Janet's fair name would be bandied from door to door in scandal-loving Washington.

"Have you spent all your life in this city?" asked Duncan, with such abruptness that Marjorie started perceptibly.

"Yes—no," she stammered, the question taking her by surprise. "I used to go every summer to our New England home, but Aunt Yvonné prefers returning to Philadelphia whenever I—I—have a vacation." She did not add that lack of funds had made them all the year residents of the National

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Capital, but Duncan guessed the reason underlying her slight hesitancy. Was there no way to win her confidence?

"How long were you Admiral Lawrence's secretary?"

"Over two years," shortly; then a sudden thought struck her. "Do you know Admiral Lawrence?" and the darkness hid her loss of color.

"I met him when he was with the Pacific fleet, and before his promotion to rear-admiral. He has the reputation of being a fine type of an American naval officer."

"Have you met him recently?"

"I? No. Take care of that curb." She stumbled somewhat and he assisted her across the street. "My father entertained the officers of the fleet whenever they came to San Francisco, but I doubt if Admiral Lawrence will remember me. I only saw him when home on my college vacations."

Marjorie heaved a sigh of relief; she dreaded his hearing of Admiral Lawrence's charge against her, for she feared his condemnation. In their daily intercourse she had gradually realized that the silent, reserved man had high ideals and exacted a high standard in his friends. His altered manner of the past week had hurt as well as piqued her; until then she had taken his companionship and good opinion as a matter of course. Duncan was some eight years Janet's senior, and his silent watchfulness had contributed to Marjorie's success as a chaperon. He had insisted that his sister show her every considera-

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tion, and that her advice should be followed in all social matters. She could ill afford to lose such a friend.

"It was very kind of you to call on Aunt Yvonett," she said, changing the subject abruptly.

"I had intended to go before this," replied Duncan courteously. "Mother and Janet have spoken so frequently of Madame Yvonett that I have been very anxious to meet her."

"Everyone loves Aunt Yvonett," answered Marjorie warmly. "I wish my fairy godmother had bequeathed me her power of fascination." Duncan made no reply, and Marjorie ran up the short flight of steps of the Fordyce home, and laid an impatient finger on the electric bell.

"I have my key," remonstrated Duncan, pulling it out and opening the front door. "I hope our long walk hasn't tired you," as she stepped past him into the house.

"Not a bit," pausing in the hall while he divested himself of his overcoat. "I feel as fresh as a daisy."

Duncan inspected her carefully, from her well-shod feet to her imperiously carried head, and he was conscious of an accelerated pulse as he caught the full witchery of her lovely eyes. He stepped swiftly to her side, a longing to touch her, to hold her in his arms overmastered him."

"I wonder where Janet can be," she said, the coquetry dropping from her, as her anxieties returned. "Do ask Perkins if she is in the house."

Duncan drew back. "Janet? Do you think of

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no one but Janet?" and without waiting for an answer he walked down the hall, but before he left her, Marjorie had seen in Duncan's eyes the message which every daughter of Eve translates by instinct. With strangely fluttering heart she sought her room and in that safe haven paused for breath. Day-dreams were not for her; she was only his mother's paid employee, and . . . one man had not scrupled to lie to her. . . .

Over in Georgetown, Barnard, in immaculate evening dress, opera hat and overcoat, paused to light another cigarette. "So Aunt Margaret never regained consciousness," he said aloud. "*What* a relief!"

CHAPTER XII

A TANGLED WEB

EARLIER that same afternoon Janet had started for Madame Yvonett's residence intending to join Marjorie there, but as she crossed Dupont Circle into Massachusetts Avenue, an automobile drew up alongside the curb, and a cheery voice hailed her.

"This is luck," exclaimed Tom Nichols, springing out of his roadster, and clasping her hand warmly. "Where are you going Miss Janet?"

"Down to see Madame Yvonett," Janet's piquant face dimpled into a smiling welcome.

"Fine! I was just on the way to her house myself; jump in and I'll take you there."

"All right, thanks." Janet climbed into the motor car, and after arranging the rug over her lap, Tom took his seat behind the steering wheel, and in a second more they were off. At the corner of Scott Circle Tom slackened speed.

"Suppose we go for a spin first," he coaxed. "It's a glorious day for a run in the country."

"But I promised to meet Marjorie——"

"Well, so you can," cutting her objection short. "If we get there by half-past five it will be time

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enough; Cousin Yvonett always has a late dinner. Besides, it's always better to be late at a party, it insures a warm welcome."

"Sometimes too warm a one," laughed Janet. "What will mother say to my going motoring with you and leaving Marjorie behind?"

"Oh, your mother won't mind, I'm only Marjorie's cousin," carelessly. "I'm sure your physician will prescribe plenty of ozone after last night's dance, and the air's glorious today, do come?"

Janet wavered. She was pretty certain her mother would not approve, but—it was a perfect winter's day, clear and bracing; she was tired of a stuffy house, and then—and then she admired and liked Tom Nichols. Her warm blood pulsed a trifle faster, then ebbed more slowly. Was it disloyal to Chichester Barnard to crave the presence of another man? She put the thought from her with frowning impatience.

"I can go a little distance," she conceded.

"Bully for you!" and the glance he turned on her held more than admiration. "Will you be warm enough?"

"Oh, plenty," Janet pulled the collar of her fur coat up about her ears, and snuggled back in her seat, the heavy laprobe drawn tightly in place.

"These side doors keep out the drafts," as he spoke Tom swung his car around the circle and continued down the avenue. "How would you like to go out to Bladensburg and see the battlefield?"

"Isn't that too far?"

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"No; it's only about five miles from here, we'll do it in no time," and not waiting for an answer, Tom accelerated the motor, and they shot past several carriages and automobiles. In a short time he swung the car into H Street. That thoroughfare being comparatively free of traffic, he turned to his silent companion. "Why did Marjorie leave the dance so early last night?"

"She had a bad sick headache, poor dear," with careless compassion. "I don't think Marjorie's very strong."

"She isn't exactly robust, but I wouldn't call her delicate," replied Tom. "How is she to-day?"

"Apparently all right again," Janet filled her lungs with delicious cold air. "Mother says Marjorie has too much on her mind; perhaps that is the reason she is so distraught lately."

"It must be that, usually she is the cheeriest soul imaginable," Tom sounded his siren as he cut across an intersecting street. "I'm afraid Marjorie sees too much of——" he stopped, and his face clouded. His code of honor prevented him from running down a possible rival behind his back; and rumor had it that Janet was captivated by Barnard's handsome face and charm of manner, nor could he hurt her by speaking of Barnard's past infatuation for Marjorie. It would not be playing fair to Marjorie; he could not make trouble between the two girls. In his heart he vowed Barnard should not win Janet. "Marjorie has seen too much of hard times," he amended. "Financial difficulties play

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hob with a person's physical and mental condition."

"Mental condition," repeated Janet thoughtfully. "I wonder if that accounts for——take care——oh, why will children play in the streets?" as Tom swerved the car just in time to avoid running over a little pickaninny.

"Sorry I frightened you," he said contritely, turning the car into the Bladensburg Pike. "Have you ever been out this way?"

"No. Where did you say we are going?"

"Bladensburg; it's a quaint old-fashioned little town and of historic interest because the Battle of Bladensburg was fought there in 1814. . . ."

"When the British defeated our troops and captured Washington?"

"Correct. I'm glad to see, Miss Janet, you know American history. Not long ago I was asked to meet some *nouveaux riches* at dinner, and an American girl, who is now an English countess, broke into a discussion about Gettysburg to ask in a soft drawl: 'Gettysburg? What *is* Gettysburg?' "

They had left the city's unattractive outskirts behind, and were passing through more open country, and Janet, delighted and light-hearted, sat silently watching the landscape with ever-increasing interest.

"There's Bladensburg," Tom pointed to the church spires and roofs of houses showing plainly among the leafless trees. "These houses," motioning to his right, "are some of them very old, the estates having been owned by prominent colonials."

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"Where's the battlefield?"

"Right here," indicating the road they were on. "The fighting began beyond the further bridge spanning the eastern branch of the Potomac, and our troops fell back through the village and down this turnpike, the British in hot pursuit."

Janet's active imagination instantly conjured up a vision of the fighting, flying men, and the quiet sleepy Maryland village became transformed to her; she could almost hear the rattle of muskets, hoarse commands, and the roar of cannon, so vivid was the illusion.

Tom brought his car to a standstill at the side of the road near a short bridge, and pointed to a dip in the rolling meadow through which a creek meandered in long and graceful curves.

"The famous dueling ground of Bladensburg," he explained. "It was there that Commodore Stephen Decatur, the 'Bayard of the Seas,' met his brother officer, James Barron, and fell mortally wounded by him. I believe in those days trees masked the gully from sight; anyway our fiery statesmen of the past came out to this 'field of honor' to get satisfaction from their enemies and traducers."

"What excitement would ensue if they did it now!" Janet thrilled at the thought.

"Congressmen of today belong to the ancient and honorable order of ink-slingers," answered Tom. "This dueling ground never saw an opera bouffe affair. Men here fought to kill, and generally succeeded in their object."

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"Isn't the Calvert Mansion somewhere in this neighborhood?"

"Yes, at Riverdale. It's the Lord Baltimore Club now. We'll run up there and you can see it," starting the motor as he spoke.

"I think we ought to be getting back," said Janet regretfully.

"There's plenty of time," eagerly. "Riverdale's only a little over a mile away; we'll be there before you know it."

Tom kept the car down to reasonable speed while passing through Bladensburg, then opened the throttle, and they sped down the State road like an arrow shot from a bow. Suddenly above the whistling of the wind past his ears and the low hum of his straining engine, Tom heard an authoritative hail and discovered a rope stretched across the road some distance ahead, and two constables on guard. Looking backward he dimly made out, through the dust, a motor cyclist following them, and realizing he was in a trap, he brought his car to second speed.

"Stop your engine," commanded the constable, catching up with him.

Tom thought quickly. Had he been alone, he would have tried to get away, but Janet's presence prevented any attempt at evading the law.

"What's the trouble, constable?" he demanded.

The man laughed. "Speeding and joy-riding are the charges."

"Oh, come. I wasn't breaking the regulations. . . ."

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"Tell that to the J. P." At that moment the second constable reached them, and sprang on the running-board on Janet's side of the car. "Start her up again, and come into Hyattsville," directed the motor cyclist, and making the best of a bad job, Tom sulkily obeyed the order. Janet, her eyes wide with excitement, sat quietly by his side. Pretending to tuck the laprobe more securely about her, he whispered in her ear:

"If they ask who you are, don't give your real name."

"I understand," she muttered, and remained passive until the car, passing the lowered rope, reached its destination, escorted by the two constables. They bade Tom and Janet accompany them into the presence of the Justice of the Peace. Mr. Lenox, the gray-haired justice, heard the evidence against them in ominous silence.

"What is your name, miss?" he inquired sternly.

"Marjorie Langdon," answered Janet readily, and Tom gave her an approving glance.

"Your residence?" Janet told him, and the Justice turned to Tom.

"Name?" he snapped.

"Thomas Langdon Nichols, Captain —th Field Artillery, stationed at Fort Myer, Va."

"Any relation of Miss Langdon?"

"Her cousin," steadily.

The Justice laid down his pen. "Fifty dollars," he announced, holding out his hand.

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"Fifty dollars fine!" fumed Tom. "That's perfectly ridiculous."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted the Justice. "I recognize you, young man; this is the third time you've been arrested speeding on the State Road . . ."

"I haven't; you're mixing me up with someone else. . . ."

"That game won't work," the Justice shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Your name's entered on the records; you've been warned and fined for small sums, already. This joy-riding has got to stop."

"I don't joy-ride," thundered Tom, catching Janet's amused smile. "I admit I've made good time on several business trips to Baltimore . . ."

"Very thoughtful of you," commented the Justice ironically. "Fifty dollars, please."

"Dash it all! I haven't that amount with me," pulling out his wallet he counted the bank notes in it. "Here's eighteen dollars," he laid the money on the desk, and searched his pockets carefully, finally producing some small change. "This makes twenty-one fifty," stacking the silver in a neat pile on top of the bank notes. "You'll have to take that, and let me bring back the rest to-morrow."

"Fifty dollars or jail!" and the Justice sat back and regarded the raging officer with provoking calmness.

"Will you take a check for the balance?" demanded Tom, as soon as he could control his speech.

"Depends on your bank."

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Without replying, Tom went slowly through his pockets, but he had left his check-book on his desk at his quarters, and his search was a waste of time. "Let me have a blank check on the American Security and Trust Company?" he pleaded.

"Haven't one," answered the Justice curtly, and forestalled further requests by adding, "Haven't a check on any bank but a Baltimore trust company; guess you can't draw on that, young man."

Tom bit his lip savagely. "Can I use that telephone?" he asked, nodding toward the instrument.

"Sure, if you'll pay the tolls."

Tom seized the desk instrument and put in a call for Fort Myer, but it was some minutes before he got his connection, only to learn that the officers he wished to speak to were absent from their quarters. With a smothered oath he hung up the receiver and scowled at the Justice.

"Will you permit this young lady," placing his hand on Janet's arm, "to return to Washington?"

"No."

"Don't be so damned pig-headed!" stormed Tom. "I'll stay here until I can get hold of the necessary money. Miss Langdon's presence is not required."

"I'm the best judge of that; and see here, mind how you address me; I won't stand being sworn at."

Tom moved closer to Janet, and lowered his voice. "I'm afraid it will be some time before I can get money here from Fort Myer," he whispered. "Hadn't I better call up your brother?"

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"Mercy, no; please don't think of it!" protested Janet, her eyes opening in fright. "Duncan is so stern, he would never approve or understand my motoring alone with you. We must get back without letting him know anything about all this"—waving her hand toward the Justice who, "clothed in a little brief authority," was thoroughly enjoying the situation. His predecessor had been severely criticized for his lax handling of the speeders who frequented the state road between Baltimore and Washington, and he was determined to establish a record for distributing impartial justice on one and all. The fact that one of the breakers of the speed law before him was an officer of the United States Army and the other a very pretty young girl did not in the least influence him to be lenient.

One of the constables had remained in the room, and had been an interested listener to all that transpired. Janet's distressed expression finally won him over to her side.

"Say, Captain," he began, "Ain't you got a watch you can put up, and redeem later?"

Tom shook his head despondently as his fingers sought his watch pocket. "It's at Galt's getting repaired," he replied.

Janet's hopes, which had risen at the friendly constable's suggestion, sank like lead; then an idea occurred to her, and she stepped up to the desk.

"Won't you accept this as collateral?" she asked, slipping a gold bracelet over her wrist and handing it to the Justice. "Captain Nichols will bring you the

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twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents to-morrow, and get it back."

Without answering, the Justice stooped and attentively examined the handsome bauble in his hand. The bracelet, of curious design, was studded with diamonds and emeralds, and the Justice, who had some knowledge of precious stones, was impressed by its value. He turned the matter carefully over in his mind before announcing his decision, and the minutes seemed endless to Janet and Tom, who were burning to get away.

"I'll keep it," the Justice stated finally, laying the bracelet carefully on the table and sweeping Tom's money into his cash box; then he laid the bracelet in the box, and snapped the lid shut. He paused to make an entry in his ledger, then turned back to Tom. "Let this be a lesson to you," he said severely. "You're an officer of Uncle Sam's, and you of all people ought to help preserve the Government's laws. This state road is not a race course. Good evening."

"I'll be back tomorrow," called Tom from the doorway, and he and Janet lost little time in getting under way once again. The short afternoon had come to a close, and Janet's alarm grew as they motored slowly out into the darkness.

"What shall I say to the family?" she murmured.

"Let me tell them the truth," advised Tom. "It was all my fault, I'll take the blame."

"Father will probably forbid my seeing you any more," answered Janet, dolefully.

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"Good Lord!" ejaculated Tom blankly; he felt as if the earth had dropped from him. "But I must see you, I—I—can't get on without seeing you——"

"Can't you?" a little hope crept into her voice. "I—I—should miss you awfully . . ."

"Would you?" Tom's strong voice was husky. "I feel like a brute to have gotten you into this scrape; I must get you out of it——"

"Please do," she pleaded, and stirred Tom's brain to quicker action.

"Suppose we go straight to Madame Yvonett's, spend a few minutes there; then if Marjorie hasn't waited for you, we'll go right to your house, and explain that we went down the streets Marjorie didn't return on—and so missed her."

"That sounds a trifle involved," Janet knitted her brows in anxious thought. "However, I think it will do, and no one need ever know."

"I'll never tell," promised Tom soothingly. "By Jove! it was clever of you to give Marjorie's name to the J. P.; I'll get back your bracelet tomorrow and no one will be the wiser."

"You are such a comfort," sighed Janet; impulsively Tom laid his right hand tenderly on hers. "I—I—always enjoy myself when with you."

An hour after Tom and Janet's departure another "speeder" was brought before Mr. Lenox, Justice of the Peace for Hyattsville. But the tall, well-groomed, middle-aged man who faced him, unlike Tom wasted no time in disputing the fine imposed.

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"Can you change a twenty dollar bill?" he inquired, drawing out a well-filled wallet. "This is the first time I've motored down from Baltimore, and I'm sorry my chauffeur broke the speed laws. Hope of a Christmas dinner at home is my excuse."

"Can't blame you much," acknowledged the Justice, his sternness thawed by the other's geniality. "Let's see if I have change," opening his cash box, and dumping its contents on the desk. The stranger picked up Janet's bracelet as it rolled toward him, and glanced idly at it; then his attention was arrested by the unusual design, and he examined it minutely, even to the tiny initials and date engraved on the inside. "Here's your change, sir," added the Justice.

"Thanks," the stranger pocketed the money without counting it. "Pretty bracelet you have here," handing it back to Lenox as he spoke. "Very unusual in appearance; would you mind telling me where you got it?"

"No, why should I? A girl, riding with her beau, left it here in lieu of a fine for speeding. She, or rather her escort, Captain Nichols, will redeem it tomorrow."

"I see," the stranger stared in deep astonishment at the Justice. "If it isn't breaking a confidence, can you give me the young woman's name?"

"Sure," the Justice rapidly ran his finger down the open ledger. "Miss Marjorie Langdon, 910 Thirteenth Street, Washington."

"Miss Marjorie Langdon," repeated the stranger; then roused himself. "Much obliged, sir, good

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evening." And he hastily left the room and entered his limousine. "Home, François," he directed; then as the lights of Hyattsville disappeared in the distance, he confided his reflections to the flower-filled glass vase. "What in the devil's name was Miss Marjorie Langdon doing with my daughter's bracelet in her possession?"

CHAPTER XIII

DUNCAN'S DILEMMA

PAULINE CALHOUN-COOPER laid down her embroidery with a resigned sigh as her brother, after striding moodily up and down the drawing-room, made a sudden dash for the door.

"Where are you going, Joe?" she called.

"Out——" and the front door banged shut behind him.

Pauline's lips curved in an irritating smile. "Your 'poy Joe' gets more impossible every day, mother. I think father had better be told——"

"No you don't, young lady," Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper spoke with unwonted authority. "I won't permit any further interference."

"Oh, well, take the consequences then," replied her daughter, undutifully. "Chichester Barnard warned me Joe spends most of his time with that trained nurse, Kathryn Allen; he said he couldn't tell *me* what kind of a character she is"—Pauline raised her eyebrows suggestively.

Her mother reddened angrily. "I'll thank Mr. Barnard to mind his own business," she snapped. "Joe is too much of a gentleman to drop Miss

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Allen's acquaintance after her kindness to him. He tells me their friendship is entirely platonic."

"Is that all?" Pauline's sarcastic drawl was enough to exasperate a far better tempered woman than Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper. "Don't blame me, mother dear, if you get an undesirable daughter-in-law."

Her mother's retort was checked by the entrance of Janet and Marjorie, and she rose somewhat flurriedly to greet them.

"So good of you to call," she cooed. "Pauline, dear, you know Miss Langdon. Come and sit by me, Miss Janet, and tell me of all your gay doings. Joe will be so sorry to have missed you."

"We caught a vanishing glimpse of him as we drove up to the door," Janet loosened her furs, for the room was uncomfortably warm. "Are you going to the Charity Ball on Monday evening?"

"Yes, we have taken a box. Can't you come with us?" added Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper hospitably.

"Thanks very much, but I believe father has secured a box also," Janet smiled prettily upon her hostess while her hand played nervously with the silver ornaments on the tea-table. "I think it's awfully kind of you and your daughter to be so sweet to me, a newcomer."

Marjorie, sitting some distance from Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper and Janet, watched them anxiously, and ignored Pauline's decidedly cool manner and curt speech. They talked on uninteresting topics for some time, and Marjorie was on the point of rising

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to leave when she heard Janet accept Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's offer of a cup of tea. She had neglected to warn Janet before entering that they must make their visit a short one, as their calling list that afternoon was exceedingly long. There was nothing for it but to wait until Janet had swallowed her exceedingly hot cup of tea, which the butler had just brought in, and concealing her impatience, she surrendered herself to the inevitable.

"So sorry you had to leave the Walbridge dance," said Pauline, as conversation languished. "Miss Fordyce tells me you are subject to—eh—headaches, isn't it?"

"Headaches of the very worst kind," acknowledged Marjorie. Her eyes roved about the room, which she had known so well when her aunt had owned the house; even some of the furniture, many pieces of which had been sold with the house, were still in use in the drawing-room, and she had much ado to keep back a rush of tears at the recollections their presence gave her.

"I am told headaches are the bane of existence as one advances in years," said Pauline sweetly. "Why, father!" as a tall man entered the room. "What brings you home at this hour?"

"A moment's leisure," he replied. "How do you do, Miss Fordyce," shaking hands cordially with Janet, and turning toward Marjorie. There was a moment's awkward pause, then Pauline remembered her manners.

"Miss Langdon, father."

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Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper stepped forward and held out his hand as Marjorie rose and advanced to meet him, "Miss Marjorie Langdon?" he inquired, and she wondered faintly at the concentration of his gaze.

"Yes," she answered, and her large hazel-gray eyes smiled back at him with friendly interest. How came so distinguished looking a man to have such an impossible family?

"If I am not mistaken, you are related to Madame Yvonett, are you not?" he asked, and again his keen scrutiny swept over her.

"She is my great-aunt."

"I gathered that was the relationship; please give her my kind remembrances and say that I hope to call soon." Calhoun-Cooper turned back to his wife. "Miss Langdon is a great-granddaughter of Hugh Pemberton, who gave my father his start in life," he explained. "You must show every hospitality to Miss Langdon, mother."

Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper, divided between vexation at being called "mother" in public by her usually thoughtful husband, and bewilderment at Marjorie's suddenly increased importance, clutched the tea-tray in despair.

"Of course, John, of course," she stammered. "Dear Miss Langdon, will you have a cup of tea? Where is them tongs?"

Janet, catching sight of Pauline's furious expression, almost laughed aloud. She covered her mouth with her large muff, the better to conceal her amuse-

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ment. Truly, Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's parts of speech were flying to the four winds.

"You are very kind," said Marjorie gently. "But I have had to give up drinking tea and coffee, Miss Cooper," addressing Pauline directly. "Mrs. Fordyce wishes to know if you and your brother will dine with her informally on Tuesday next?"

"I don't recall any engagement for that night," Pauline slightly mollified, answered with more than her usual warmth; a more intimate footing with the Fordyce family counted for much in her social ambitions. "Please tell Mrs. Fordyce that Joe and I will be happy to come."

"That is very nice," smiled Marjorie. "Mrs. Fordyce has sent you a formal invitation which you will receive this evening, but she asked me to speak of the matter as the time is short. Come, Janet, I am afraid we must go. Good-bye, so glad we found you."

Calhoun-Cooper accompanied the two girls to their limousine. "Don't forget my message to your aunt, Miss Langdon," he said, as he closed the door of the machine.

"Where next?" inquired Janet, as Marjorie consulted her list.

"I think we had better leave cards at the White House," she said, and Janet, picking up the speaking tube, gave the order, and the big car started down Sixteenth Street.

"Have you seen Captain Nichols lately, Marjorie?" asked Janet, breaking the brief pause.

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"No, he hasn't been near me." Marjorie studied Janet's flushed face with keen attention. Could it be possible that the young débutante was falling in love with Tom? Had she lost interest in Chichester Barnard? With all her heart Marjorie hoped such was the case. Janet was too charming a girl to be taken in by the wiles of a fortune hunter. To Marjorie's relief, she had seen nothing of Chichester Barnard since meeting him at her aunt's on Christmas Day, nor had he called recently at the Fordyces. It was not like him to be easily discouraged, he was of the persevering kind, and Marjorie marveled at his absence. Were Janet and he meeting clandestinely? The thought sent a cold shiver down her back. Abruptly she turned to Janet.

"Were you walking with Chichester Barnard yesterday?" she inquired.

"No," replied Janet shortly, and again lapsed into silence.

Janet's thoughts at the moment were centered on Tom Nichols, as they had been all too frequently of late, considering she regarded herself secretly engaged to Chichester Barnard. Though absent, the latter's daily notes, received surreptitiously, were a constant reminder of her pledge to him. Barnard's charm of manner and conversation always left her breathless, carried away by the fervor of his pleading, but she turned restive under the exotic, extravagant phrases which cloaked his passionate intentness on paper. She longed for Tom's breezy wholesomeness and merry smile.

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On their return from Bladensburg she and Tom had faithfully carried out their prearranged program, and no question had been raised, so far as Janet knew, as to where she had spent the early afternoon on Christmas. But what was giving Janet more concern than she had known in many years was the fact that she had neither seen nor heard from Tom since that afternoon, and that she had never received back the diamond and emerald bracelet which she had left with the Justice of the Peace at Hyattsville. And Tom had promised to get it for her the very next day!

"Did mother invite Captain Nichols to our dinner next week?" she asked.

"She put his name on the list, but I didn't get the invitation written before we came out; however, I'll call him up tonight, and ask him verbally and send him a reminder card later."

"There's Duncan!" exclaimed Janet, catching a glimpse of her brother as the car turned the corner into H Street. "I hope he won't forget to order the violets he promised me."

Spying them at the same moment Duncan raised his hat, and laughingly declining Janet's frantic gesture to join them, he continued on his way to the Metropolitan Club. But at Seventeenth Street Tom Nichols drew his roadster up in front of the curb, and leaned forward to speak to him.

"Jump in and come over to the Army and Navy Club with me," he said, and Duncan, time hanging heavy on his hands, accepted the invitation with

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alacrity. "I intended calling up your house, Fordyce, to ask if your sister is home."

"She's out calling; I just saw her and Miss Langdon in the limousine."

"Do you think she can see me this evening?" Tom swung his car into I Street.

"I'm afraid not, we are all dining at the British Embassy. Will you be there?"

"Not invited," replied Tom shortly. He parked the roadster near the entrance to the club, and led Duncan into one of the smoking-rooms. Duncan found him singularly morose, and regarded the usually jovial young officer in some perplexity; then he concluded that Janet and Tom must have had a squabble of some sort and that the latter was trying to make up the quarrel.

Tom, in fact, was exceedingly disturbed. He had just returned from Hyattsville, where he had redeemed Janet's bracelet. His duties at Fort Myer had prevented his going there during the past two days, and he had not dared to ask a brother officer to go in his place, fearing news of the arrest for speeding might leak out, with other details. He had hoped to find Janet at home that afternoon and return the bracelet. He had tried several times to talk to her on the telephone, but each time the Fordyce servants had told him Janet was either out or engaged. He would have confided the whole affair to Marjorie except for his promise to Janet.

"Can you go to the Charity Ball with us?" asked Duncan.

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"Why yes, I'd like to very much," answered Tom, awaking to the fact that he had not spoken for some moments.

"Good, don't trouble to get a ticket, and I think you had better dine with us first——"

"Excuse me, Captain, but you are wanted on the telephone," interrupted a club attendant.

"I'll be right back, Fordyce," Tom sprang precipitously to his feet; perhaps Janet had called him up. "Wait for me," and he disappeared after the attendant.

An older man sitting by a window some distance away glanced up at hearing the name "Fordyce," and scanned Duncan intently, then rose and slowly approached him.

"I beg your pardon, but are you not Duncan Fordyce?" he asked.

Duncan looked at him attentively for a second, then stepped forward.

"How do you do, Admiral Lawrence," he said, extending his hand.

The Admiral's haggard face lighted with a pleased smile. "So you remember me, Duncan; it's some years since we met," a sigh accompanied the words. "How is your dear mother?"

"Very well, thank you. Won't you sit down, sir?" pulling forward a chair.

"Please thank your mother for her kind note of sympathy; I intended answering it——" the Admiral broke off abruptly and cleared his throat. "Tell me of yourself, Duncan, since we last met."

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"There's nothing very much to recount, Admiral; I graduated from Yale, then from the Harvard Law School; traveled a bit in China and South America, and on my return joined a law firm in San Francisco. I am East on a short visit."

"Sorry to have been so long," said Tom, appearing behind the Admiral, whom he already knew. "Much obliged to you, sir, for taking care of Fordyce in my absence."

"Duncan and I are old friends," Admiral Lawrence stepped back. "I won't interrupt you two any longer."

"Don't run away, Admiral," protested Tom, "it's I who must be leaving. Hope you'll forgive me, Fordyce, but they've telephoned me to return to Myer at once. Please tell Miss Janet I'll be in tomorrow." He hesitated; should he give the bracelet to Duncan? No. Janet had particularly charged him not to let any inkling of her motor ride reach her brother's ears, and Duncan would naturally ask him how he came to have his sister's bracelet in his possession. "Ask her if she will telephone me what hour will be most convenient for her to see me," he added hurriedly.

"I will," promised Duncan, turning back to say good-bye to Admiral Lawrence.

"Can you spare me a few minutes now, Duncan?" the latter asked anxiously.

"Certainly, sir; my time is at your disposal."

Admiral Lawrence surveyed the room in silence;

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then led the way to the farther end, where two chairs stood by themselves.

"Sit down, Duncan," he said, dragging his seat nearer the window. "We're out of ear-shot over here, and I've something important to say to you," he stopped, and Duncan waited respectfully for him to continue. "I called up your house yesterday, and your butler told me your father was out of town."

"He went over to Philadelphia on business; we are expecting him back tomorrow or next day."

"I may not be in town when he returns; therefore I must speak to you," the Admiral paused, "about a very delicate matter. . . ."

"Yes," put in Duncan encouragingly, as his companion again paused.

"Marjorie Langdon is in your mother's employ, is she not?"

"Yes." But Duncan's slight start was not observed by the Admiral, who continued his questions.

"As companion to your sister?"

"Yes," replied Duncan for the third time.

The Admiral turned in his chair and made sure that no one was in their vicinity, then leaned toward Duncan. "Marjorie Langdon was my secretary for the past two years; on November first, I discharged her because I found she was a thief."

For a second Duncan was blind to his surroundings. But Admiral Lawrence read nothing of his mental suffering in his expressionless face. Marjorie then was really a thief! Marjorie, his ideal in womanhood! His strong hands clenched themselves

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so tightly over the arms of his chair that the knuckles shone white. He had succeeded in conquering the suspicions he had harbored against Marjorie after the mysterious disappearance of his father's forty dollars. Marjorie, if guilty of the theft of the money, would never have mentioned the exact sum, one hundred and fifty dollars, when she handed him the bank notes to give his father. She *must* have been innocent, he had reasoned, with dogged determination. Now another man thought her a thief!

"I would not have disclosed her true character had I not heard that Marjorie was with your sister continually," said the Admiral slowly. "It is not proper that a young girl should be subjected to such contaminating influences."

"One moment," Duncan held up his hand protestingly. "You have made a serious charge, Admiral, against Miss Langdon; can you prove your statements?"

The Admiral whitened with anger. "I am not in the habit of lying," he retorted stiffly.

"Nor am I accusing you of lying," calmly. "But in my father's absence you have come to me, as the acting head of my house, to warn me against one of my father's employees. I am within my rights, sir, in demanding your proofs that Miss Langdon is a ——" Duncan choked over the word thief—"is not a proper associate for my sister."

"Perhaps you are right," admitted the Admiral, his anger cooling. "I presume you have met my

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wife's nephew by marriage, Chichester Barnard
—,”

“I have.”

“My wife, who has always been wealthy in her own right, promised her first husband, Dimintry Barnard, that she would leave one hundred thousand dollars to his nephew, Chichester, whom he had legally adopted, and in making her will some years ago, she carried out her promise. Just before her last illness, she quarreled with Chichester over some unfortunate investments he had made for her, and incensed by his manner, declared she would revoke her bequest to him.

“On the last day of October my wife, then a very sick woman, sent for our lawyer, Charles Alvord, and bade him draw up a codicil revoking Chichester's bequest. Alvord took his notes into my library, and without my knowledge, had Marjorie Langdon typewrite the codicil,” Duncan drew a long slow breath but said nothing, and the Admiral continued: “He also had her make a carbon copy of the codicil, thinking if the first was ruined in my wife's effort to sign it, he would have the other at hand to substitute. But my wife signed the original copy, and I instructed Marjorie to put it in my safe. The next morning, on opening my safe, I found the unsigned copy of the codicil, and not the signed one.”

“And you believe——?” questioned Duncan.

“That Marjorie Langdon deliberately destroyed the signed codicil and placed the unsigned one in

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my safe, hoping the substitution would not be noticed until after my wife's death."

"The last is supposition only," commented Duncan.

"Not so fast," retorted Admiral Lawrence. "Marjorie was the only one outside our family and the lawyer who knew of the signing of the codicil; it was given to her to place in the safe. She only, beside myself, knew the combination of the safe, and Alvord, the fool, left the unsigned copy of the codicil lying loose on my desk, ready to her hand."

"And Marjorie Langdon's motive in destroying the signed codicil?"

"Her infatuation for Chichester Barnard." The blunt answer shook even Duncan's iron self-control, and he looked hastily away, lest the Admiral read his expression. "Marjorie was the last person to leave my library that night; I was the first to go there the next morning, and the codicil was gone."

"In other words," said Duncan slowly, "you contend that Marjorie had the motive and the opportunity to steal that codicil," Lawrence nodded affirmatively. "What did she hope to accomplish?"

"To have Chichester Barnard inherit the hundred thousand dollars," the Admiral rose heavily to his feet. "The other codicil remained unsigned, for my wife never regained her faculties before her death, having been first delirious and then unconscious until death mercifully released her."

"So Mr. Barnard will inherit the one hundred thousand dollars?"

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The Admiral paused. "Not without a legal fight. Get rid of Marjorie, Duncan, before the scandal is aired."

"You mean you are going to charge Miss Langdon with the theft of the codicil?"

"I do. She thwarted my wife in her last conscious act, and by God, she shall pay for it!"

Duncan rose to his feet. "Kindly notify me, Admiral, of whatever steps you propose taking," he said, accompanying the older man to the entrance of the club-house.

"Certainly, Duncan, certainly." The Admiral walked to the curb with him. "I realize you will want to know in time to prevent your family from becoming involved in the scandal."

"You mistake my meaning, sir; I desire to know what legal steps you contemplate taking, because I propose to defend Miss Langdon in the courts. Good evening," and lifting his hat, Duncan turned on his heel.

How far he walked or where he walked he could never afterwards tell, but he finally became conscious that the park policeman in Lafayette Square was regarding him with open suspicion.

"Where am I?" he asked, turning in bewilderment to the stalwart guardian of the peace.

"Sure, I don't wonder ye ask; ye've chased yourself around Jackson's statue until ye've given me the blind staggers. What ails ye, sir?"

"Nothing," Duncan pulled himself together and finally got his bearings. "Where can I find a taxi?"

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"At the Shoreham, that way," waving his arm, and Duncan walked in the direction indicated.

He was about to cross H Street and enter the hotel when Small's window display across Fifteenth Street caught his attention, and he remembered promising to send Janet a bunch of violets to wear to the British Embassy. Entering the florist's shop, he hastily gave his directions; then paused, and selected a beautiful corsage bouquet of single violets.

"I'll take this also," he said. "Send it to Miss Marjorie Langdon, care of Mr. Calderon Fordyce, same address as the other; and—eh—give me a blank card," discovering he had none of his visiting cards with him. Taking the blank card which the attentive clerk brought him, he wrote: "With best wishes," and signed his initials. Before placing the card in an envelope, he studied the message and his bold, distinctive writing in some doubt.

"Lord!" he muttered. "Will she take the 'D. F.' for Duncan Fordyce—or—damn fool."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PHILANDERER

SO it's off with the old love?"

"My dear Kathryn, it was never on," Barnard looked squarely at the pretty nurse facing him, a faint trace of distress visible in his polished manner. "When I called to see my aunt, Mrs. Lawrence, I always showed you the civility and attention which I accord to any woman; that you chose to attach a deeper meaning——" he shrugged his shoulders. "I very deeply regret the—misunderstanding."

Kathryn Allen's gaze shifted from his face to the desk, and she saw the ornaments dimly through blinding tears.

"You repudiate——?" she asked huskily.

"Everything you claim—yes."

"Then your presents, your photograph. . . ."

"Meant nothing," with smiling effrontery, "*except pour passer le temps.*"

In the stillness the click, click of a typewriter in the adjoining office was distinctly audible. Barnard, with an impatient frown at the wall clock, turned back to the silent woman. He abhorred a scene, and Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper had an engage-

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ment with him shortly; it would never do for him to find Kathryn Allen in that office. The pause lengthened, then the woman rose shakily to her feet, and meeting Barnard's look of solicitude, a bitter laugh broke from her.

"You have shown me a new side," she said, controlling herself with difficulty. "You are not usually neglectful of your own interests, Chichester; hadn't you better cultivate your memory?" and before he could answer, she slipped from the room and was gone.

Reaching the sidewalk Kathryn walked aimlessly up F Street until her wandering attention was caught by a tall clock in front of a jeweler's shop, whose hands registered three o'clock, and she paused instantly.

"Mercy," she muttered. "I've forgotten Joe!" and turning about she made her way to Harvey's restaurant. Joe Calhoun-Cooper, lurking in the doorway, watched her approach with eagerness.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "I thought you had forgotten to come."

"Not a bit of it," following him to the ladies' dining-room. "Mrs. Wallace was not so well, and I was detained. Nurses can't be choosers, you know."

"Why don't you give up this drudgery?" asked Joe heatedly. "Marry me, my darling——" sinking his voice.

"Marry you?" repeated Kathryn drearily, then her face brightened into a quick warm smile. "Well, why not?"

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"Do you mean it?" Joe was on his feet, his eyes alight.

"Sit down, you foolish boy," and Joe, a trifle abashed by the waiter's stare, sank down into his seat.

"What will you have, Kathryn?" he inquired, taking up the menu card.

"Some hot roasted oysters and plenty of pepperine sauce; no, no wine," as he turned to the wine list. "You know I don't approve of that, Joe."

"Just a cocktail," he pleaded. "It's bitter cold outside." But Kathryn shook her head.

"Don't tempt me, Joe;" she settled back in her seat and looked about the restaurant. At that hour the room was empty and she heaved a sigh of relief; she was not anxious to encounter any friend who might chance to come in. She shivered slightly, half overcome by a tormenting memory. "I will take some coffee," she added hastily.

Joe finished giving his order, and then turned his attention fully on his companion. She looked extremely pretty and young in her conventional tailored-suit and stylish hat under which her red hair curled tantalizingly. Her good looks and engaging manner had captivated Joe when she attended him at Garfield Hospital the year before, he having preceded his family to Washington, and developed typhoid fever soon after his arrival.

"Why did you telephone that you had to see me, Joe?" asked Kathryn, breaking the silence.

"It's nearly a week since our last walk together,"

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he answered moodily. "I began to think you were avoiding me."

"Nonsense; I told you I've been extra busy. . ."

"But a nurse always has her regular hours off," he broke in.

"During which I've been making up lost sleep," she retorted. "Joe, dear, don't quarrel with me ——" her eyes filled with tears. "I can't bear it."

"My dearest," he patted the slender hand resting on the table with tender fingers. "I'll eat dirt, sooner than make you unhappy."

"Try the oysters, instead," she advised, with a half hysterical laugh, as the waiter placed the tempting dishes before them. The presence of the waiter, who stood behind Joe's chair shucking the roasted oysters in rapid succession, prevented further private conversation, to Joe's great annoyance. He wanted Kathryn to himself, and her half-bantering, half-tender manner but added fuel to the flame of his passion.

"Let's get out of here," he suggested, rising and pushing back his chair. While playing with her hot coffee and oysters, of which she was usually inordinately fond, Kathryn had done some rapid thinking, and having decided on her course of action, she was quite willing to leave, and in a few minutes more they were strolling up Pennsylvania Avenue.

"What time do you have to return?" inquired Joe, stopping before the Raleigh.

"Not until six o'clock."

"Good!" Joe beckoned to one of the hackmen

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standing in front of the hotel, and as the brougham drew up before them, he wrenched open the door and before Kathryn had quite decided, she was half pushed into the vehicle. "Go to the Mall," shouted Joe, springing in after her.

"Well, upon my word!" she ejaculated, considerably startled. "Joe—Joe—what's come over you?"

Joe did not answer the question directly, but the passion in his eyes brought a hot wave of color to her cheeks; the carriage was rapidly traversing an unfrequented street, and he was not to be denied. His arms crept around her, and despite her vehement protests, he rained kisses upon her lips until the fire consuming him communicated itself to her, and she gave back kiss for kiss with an ardor which matched his own.

"Joe, you must behave!" she stammered, withdrawing as far from him as the narrow confines of the carriage permitted. "Suppose we are seen? What would your family say?"

"They will have to know some time," he protested. "Beside, we are not likely to meet any of our friends in this part of the town."

"I am not so sure of that," she glanced uneasily out of the window. "We must be getting back, Joe; tell the driver to go up side streets until he reaches Seventeenth and S Streets."

"Will you marry me?" demanded Joe, ignoring her request. "Will you, my darling?"

"I'll give you my answer——"

"Yes?" eagerly, as she paused.

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"When we reach Seventeenth and S Streets," and her alluring smile set his pulses racing. Opening the door he gave his directions to the driver, then settled back beside her.

"Why do you want to tantalize me?" he asked reproachfully.

"It's good for you," shrugging her shoulders. "You are spoiled at home. By the way, do you propose telling your family of our engagement—providing I accept you?" archly.

"In my own good time," sulkily. "If they know too soon . . ."

"They'll send you away from my baleful influence." A mocking smile lighted her eyes and lips. Joe winced, the remark was too near the truth to be pleasant.

"It's no thanks to your friend, Mrs. Hemmingway, that father doesn't know now," he grumbled.

"What do you mean?" in startled surprise.

"I found a letter from her in father's mail last Monday," he pulled out a much soiled envelope. "Your letters used to come under cover of her address, so I recognized her writing, and guessing something devilish was up, hooked it before father came home."

"I see," said Kathryn slowly. "And what did my amiable landlady say in her letter to your father?"

"I don't know," handing her the unopened envelope. "I waited to give it to you to read; I would have told you of it sooner, but you would not see me."

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"Could not see you," she corrected gently; then without further words opened and read the letter. A sharp intake of her breath attracted Joe's attention, and he turned from the window in time to see her tearing the letter into infinitesimal pieces, her face white with fury.

"The cat!" she exclaimed. "The vile, treacherous cat! And after I've been so good to her. Thank heaven you caught the letter, Joe; it was clever of you, my dearest."

"Luck was with me," admitted Joe frankly, pleased, however, at the implied compliment. "I never trusted Mrs. Hemmingway; you remember I warned you against her."

"Yes, yes, so you did. Oh, Joe, the things she said about you in this letter!" opening the carriage door and tossing out the scraps of paper. "They make my blood boil."

"My blessed darling," as she snuggled up against his shoulder, "if I only had enough money, I'd carry you off tonight."

"Remember I haven't yet given you my answer," teasingly.

"I'd marry you without it," sturdily. "Lord! if I only had the luck of some people—Chichester Barnard, for instance."

Kathryn's body stiffened and every drop of blood deserted her face. "What about Chichester Barnard?" she asked in barely more than a whisper.

"Didn't you read in this morning's paper that Mrs. Lawrence's will had been offered for probate,

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and that she bequeathed him a hundred thousand dollars?"

"I had no chance to look at the papers," she answered dully. Immersed in his own prospective happiness he failed to observe the anguish which dimmed her eyes. Suddenly she roused herself. "So Mr. Barnard is a wealthy man; well, merit usually wins in the end." The covert sneer was lost on her companion.

"Barnard's a good chap," he said tolerantly. "He deserves his luck."

"I presume now he will marry Marjorie Langdon."

"Marry Marjorie Langdon?" Joe's hearty burst of laughter covered the quiver in Kathryn's voice. "Lord bless you, he's trying for higher game."

"Who do you mean?" the question shot from her.

"Janet Fordyce; and do you know," lowering his voice confidentially, "Christmas Eve I got rather fuddled and was such a fool as to warn Barnard not to marry into that family."

"Were you thanked for your pains?" and the sneer in her downcast eyes was not pleasant.

"Hardly; in fact, Barnard threatened to wring my neck if I ever alluded to the Fordyce peculiarities in public."

"Tell me some other time," she coaxed. "I think, however, that Mr. Barnard is to be congratulated if he marries any woman but Marjorie Langdon."

"I rather like Marjorie."

"Do you?" she laughed mirthlessly. "Well, I hate

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her." There was no mistaking her envenomed tone, and Joe's sleepy eyes opened to twice their usual size.

"Why?" in profound astonishment.

"Because of the humiliation I have suffered at her hands; she never lost an opportunity 'to put me in my place' when we were both at the Lawrences, she as secretary and I as nurse."

"You surprise me; but come to think of it, Pauline holds about the same view of Miss Langdon that you do; thinks she's too supercilious for a paid companion."

"Is that so? Then your sister and I agree already."

"A happy omen for the future," exclaimed Joe, then his face darkened. "If Marjorie Langdon has been nasty to you, my darling, I'll cut her acquaintance."

The look she gave him was ample reward. "Ah, Joe," she said, a trifle sadly, "I fear your loyalty will be taxed to the breaking point if you marry a poor, nameless nobody like me."

"Never!" he vowed with lover-like ardor. "And, dearest, within a few years, by the terms of my grandfather's will, I shall inherit eight thousand a year."

"What!" Her surprise was genuine; Joe had never before spoken of his prospective inheritance.

"I didn't know about it myself until Christmas," went on Joe. "We can be married tomorrow if you say so; I'll get mother to advance me some

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money, and father will come across when he once meets you."

"And your sister?"

"Oh, Pauline can hang. Who cares for her opinion?" contemptuously.

"I do, for one," calmly meeting his perplexed stare. "I most earnestly desire her friendship."

"You don't know Pauline," dryly, remembering his treatment at his sister's hands. "I don't think she will add to our joy of living."

"Perhaps not, but she may be useful to me," quietly. "Oh, Joe, you don't know what it means to a bride to sever her husband from his family. Please God, you'll never have that to reproach me with."

"I was only thinking of you, dearest," put in Joe, much touched. "Between you and me, Pauline is an awful tartar." At that moment their carriage turned the corner into S Street and drew up at the curb.

"Your answer, dearest?" Joe's assurance had departed, and the hand he laid on Kathryn shook. "Will you marry me?"

"Yes," he had to bend down to catch the whispered word.

"Soon?" he urged, his voice triumphant with joy.

"Yes," and the kindly darkness hid the kiss with which they sealed their betrothal.

CHAPTER XV

IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

KATHRYN ALLEN tore open the note with impatient fingers.

MY DARLING, [she read],

Pauline tells me Janet Fordyce and Chichester Barnard frequently take tea at the Brown Tea Pot. I don't know why you asked me to find out, but, sweetheart, your word is law to your devoted

JOE.

P. S. How the hours drag! I only live when with you.

Joe might have spared himself the postscript. Kathryn did not even trouble to read it. Crumpling the note into a small ball she tossed it into the scrap basket and rising, consulted her alarm clock. The hands on the dial pointed to a quarter past three; she could go over to the hospital and register and still have ample time to enjoy a cup of tea at the Brown Tea Pot. Her valise was already packed preparatory to leaving her present case whenever her employer, a hypochondriac, decided she could dispense with her services. She had gone to her immediately after the death of Mrs. Lawrence, but the

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place did not suit. She did not care to nurse crotchety patients.

It was a little before five o'clock when she entered the Brown Tea Pot, and she found the cozy tea-room partly empty. To her delight she secured a table to herself near a large screen standing by the pantry door, and from that vantage point she commanded a fine view of the occupants of the room without herself being conspicuous. She had plenty of time to study her surroundings and admire the effect of the softly shaded electric lights which cast a becoming, rosy glow over the scene, before the two people for whom she was waiting, made their appearance.

It was the first glimpse Kathryn had had of Janet, and she watched her with jealous, angry eyes. She took in the becoming, chic street costume Janet was wearing, with grudging admiration. Chichester Barnard always had excellent taste in women. Kathryn had overheard Admiral Lawrence tell his wife that their clergyman, at his request, reproved Barnard for his fast life, and had asked him what he would do if confronted at the Judgment Seat by the women he had flirted with.

"I shouldn't be ashamed of one of them," Barnard had retorted.

Janet, barely glancing about her, selected a table across the room from where Kathryn Allen sat, and while out of ear-shot, the pretty nurse could observe them without appearing to do so. By the time Barnard had finished giving his order to their waitress, the people sitting nearest them had completed

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their tea and departed. Janet bit her lip with vexation; she had chosen that particular table because it had near neighbors, and above all things she wished to avoid anything like a private *tête-à-tête* with Barnard. Usually the Brown Tea Pot was crowded, and conversation had to be of the most trivial and impersonal character on account of the danger of being overheard. She had accepted Barnard's invitation to have tea with him against her better judgment.

Barnard made no secret of his satisfaction at their isolated position. He never troubled to turn and glance about the room, and Kathryn Allen's presence went unnoticed.

"Are you sure you would rather have hot chocolate than tea, Janet?" he inquired, with gentle solicitude.

"Quite sure. Mother says too much tea drinking is responsible for my nervous irritability."

"Your mother is too harsh a critic," he commented. "I detect no irritability on your part, only ——" he paused thoughtfully.

"Yes?" she prompted, looking away from him.

"An adorable reserve," ardently. "Why do you not let me see more of you?"

"I have already explained the reason, Chichester."

"Your social duties?" He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. "Bah! why consider such empty trifles."

"They are not trifles, but a treadmill," she retorted warmly. "But, Chichester, I don't believe mother

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and Marjorie would approve of my meeting you so often alone, and I hate to do anything underhand."

"You are the soul of honor." His look caressed her, and she shivered involuntarily. "Then why not let me call every day at your house?"

"Duncan doesn't like you," she admitted faintly. "And he has prejudiced mother——" in her desire to avoid Barnard's glance, she missed seeing the tawney gleam which for a second marred the beauty of his heavily lashed dark eyes.

"I can guess the reason for your brother's dislike," he admitted grimly. "Perhaps I can remove the cause. His interest in Miss Langdon appears mutual. Hadn't you better warn your mother to watch those two?"

"What do you mean?" She raised startled eyes to his.

"How would you like Miss Langdon as a sister-in-law?"

Janet sat in dumfounded silence. Even the arrival of their waitress with the chocolate pot, whipped cream, and hot toasted English muffins did not arouse her. Had Barnard supplied her with the key to Duncan's altered demeanor and Marjorie's shy, distraite manner? Would her mother accept Marjorie as a daughter-in-law without opposition? Duncan was her idol, and Janet knew she had always planned a most ambitious future for him.

"Then the idea doesn't appeal to you?" questioned Barnard as the waitress retired. "Well, don't worry; Marjorie has other suitors."

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"I am given to understand that you are one of them."

"By some kind friend, I suppose?" But Barnard's laugh was not as sincere and hearty as he tried to make it. "Did Pauline Calhoun-Cooper also mention that Tom Nichols is one of Marjorie's suitors?" The spoon Janet held rattled against the side of her cup. "Ah, I thought not," added Barnard, smiling quietly to himself. "Did the gallant captain never confide to you his admiration for his beautiful cousin?"

But Janet was game, notwithstanding her secret anguish. Barnard had indeed opened her eyes, but not in the way he had intended. Quickly she rallied her wits to her aid; she must not let her keen-eyed companion realize the new influence which was dominating her. Ah, love was two-edged; too late, she had divined the gold from the dross.

"Captain Nichols has made no secret of his affection for Marjorie," she retorted coolly. "Why do you seek to prejudice me against him?"

"Because I do not approve of your friendship."

"Nonsense; it's purely platonic."

"There is no such thing between a man and a maid." Barnard's tone stirred Janet's hot anger, but she controlled herself admirably. "You show your youth by advocating such views."

"Do you mean to be insulting?"

"Put such an idea instantly out of your mind." There was stern command in his eyes and voice, and Janet shrank back, frightened by the storm she had

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provoked. "I should never think of insulting you, I love you too deeply," his tones vibrated with feeling. "I respect you too highly—but I am jealous, bitterly jealous. I, and I alone, must rule your heart and mind. 'Thou shalt have no other god but me'!"

"Don't blaspheme!" She cringed back in her chair, and covered her ears with her shaking fingers. "Chichester, Chichester, I have given you no cause for jealousy."

"Perhaps not intentionally," he admitted, more quietly. "But for my comfort, you see too much of Tom Nichols."

"You are entirely mistaken. I haven't seen him for some time."

"How about your motor ride with him on Christmas Day?" She colored in spite of herself.

"How did you hear of it?" she demanded.

"News travels fast when a man boasts . . ."

"I don't believe it," she broke in vehemently. "Tom Nichols isn't that sort. He would keep his word to me to say nothing about it."

"Ah, then your intimacy has reached the stage of mutual secrets!" Barnard's brow darkened. "Now, once for all this *platonic friendship*," with biting sarcasm, "must stop. As your fiancé, I forbid you to have anything further to do with him."

"And suppose I refuse?" Janet drew her furs about her, and flung back her head defiantly. Her blood was up.

"You will do nothing so foolish."

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"I shall, too." Janet's eyes blazed back into his. "And I want you to understand that our engagement is broken."

Barnard's smile was his only answer as he contemplated her, and despite the warmth of the room and her furs, Janet felt a chill strike to her heart, and the pupils of her eyes distended with fear as Barnard bent toward her across the table.

"Pauline Calhoun-Cooper has missed her bracelet," he said quietly.

Janet crimsoned; then turned deathly pale. Fearing she would faint, Barnard raised his tea-spoon and struck his empty goblet until the glass vibrated loudly. While waiting for the waitress, he again addressed his silent companion.

"Do you still wish our engagement broken?"

"No," faintly.

"You will drop Tom Nichols?" Getting no answer, he repeated his question with more insistence.

"Yes," she promised; but the monosyllable was even fainter and more reluctant than the first.

"Good!" Barnard smiled sunnily upon her; his anger and jealousy a thing of the past. "I know you will keep faith with me, my darling," then he added in a different tone, as their waitress appeared. "Will you please bring us some more ice-water."

"I—I—must go," Janet clutched her bag and gloves in desperate haste. She felt that she should scream if she remained in the room a moment longer. She was shivering from head to foot.

"No, no, it's still early," remonstrated Barnard.

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"You haven't finished your muffin." But Janet shook her head.

"I must go," she reiterated; and Barnard, a past-master in knowing when to concede a point, rose to his feet. As they made their way to the door, they passed Judge and Mrs. Walbridge, and the latter stopped them.

"I never saw two people so interested in each other," she declared breezily; then added with elephantine playfulness, "Of course, Mr. Barnard was only telling you, Miss Fordyce, about his law cases."

"Of course," answered Barnard, the twinkle in his eyes belying his serious expression. "I was just mentioning to Miss Fordyce that crime knows no sex."

Five minutes later Kathryn Allen, back in her far corner of the room, paid for her tea and scones and went hurriedly out of the shop. She had never taken her eyes from the two people she had gone there to watch, and bitterly she regretted that she was not a lip-reader. One thought was uppermost in her mind. What hold had Chichester Barnard over Janet Fordyce?

CHAPTER XVI

A TUG OF WAR

REPRESENTATIVE J. Calhoun-Cooper laid down his pen and regarded his wife in some surprise. "Are you going to church, Augusta?"

"No, I attended the morning services." She ensconced herself in a chair near him. "Pauline told me that you wish to see me."

"Quite right; but I had no idea you were going out," Calhoun-Cooper hesitated. "However, I will not keep you long. Can you tell me who are Joe's associates in Washington?"

His wife stirred uneasily. "Do you mean men or girls?"

"Both."

"Pauline's friends and mine are his associates," with an abruptness equal to his own.

"Are you quite sure, Augusta?" She changed color under the peculiar emphasis of his voice.

"Quite; Joe has been most exemplary in his behavior," she saw a further question trembling on his lips and forestalled it. "You are never fair to Joe; you take everyone's word against his. Joe has the making of a splendid man if you didn't hector him so continuously. Give the boy a chance."

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"I have spent years doing it," Calhoun-Cooper sighed. "Unfortunately Augusta, what you term a 'chance' and I term an 'opportunity' are not synonymous."

"Your 'opportunity' spells work, I presume," and his wife frowned. "You never recollect Joe's delicate lungs."

"Delicate fiddlesticks!" interrupted her exasperated husband. "Too much smoking . . ."

"There you go again," the ready tears filled Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's eyes. "Believing tales because you want to . . ."

"Nothing of the sort."

"Then you must be fairer in your treatment of Joe," protested his wife. "Joe takes after my family, and instead of inheriting your robust health, has our constitutional delicacy."

Calhoun-Cooper glanced with some grimness mixed with amusement, at his wife's large frame and substantial weight. "Too bad the tendency in your family, when it skipped your generation, didn't crop out in Pauline," he commented slowly. "I would like a detailed answer to my question, Augusta. Who are Joe's particular associates?"

"Let me see; Duncan Fordyce and his sister, the Warren girls, Jimmie Painter, and Carroll Logan"—she paused reflectively.

"Ever hear of a Miss Kathryn Allen?" asked her husband.

"Kathryn Allen? Wasn't she Joe's nurse at Garfield. . . ."

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"So I have heard," dryly. "I am told the friendship between them has—increased."

"Is Pauline your informant?" demanded his wife, but he pretended not to hear, and she continued hurriedly, "Whatever you hear in that quarter is exaggerated nonsense. Far from spending his time with women, Joe is usually with Chichester Barnard and his other men friends."

"I haven't seen Captain Nichols here lately," Calhoun-Cooper tore a fragment of a letter into long pieces and tossed them into the scrap basket. "Do you know why he has stopped coming to see us?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," answered his wife candidly. "Unless Pauline has—has not encouraged his attentions."

"I did not know——" he broke off abruptly. "Tell me, Augusta, have you been supplying Joe with money lately?"

"I? Oh, dear no," but her eyes fell before his, and his face grew graver. "What made you think such a thing?"

"It has happened before," dryly. "I shall be exceedingly displeased if you are giving Joe money. I cut down his allowance with very good reason."

"I believe you actually begrudge Joe money," she put in passionately. "For shame, as wealthy as you are——"

"It is not a matter of wealth, but of principle," sternly. "Under the plea of his supposed constitutional lung weakness you have over-indulged Joe."

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It's greatly my fault," as his wife's sobs increased. "I gave too much time to my business and trusted to incompetent tutors. Joe has two more years to toe the mark, and in that time his character must be formed, otherwise he will go to the bad utterly. I hope you have never disobeyed my injunction against informing him of his prospective inheritance by the terms of my father's will?"

"Do you take me for a fool?" she asked sharply, and changed the subject. "I must say, John, your father was very remiss not to leave a like amount to Pauline, she bitterly resents Joe's getting all that money."

"So you have told Pauline?" Her husband's eyes kindled in wrath. "Well, upon my word! Will you never learn discretion?"

Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper promptly took refuge behind more tears, a bulwark which usually never failed her; but her husband was too indignant to pay heed to her emotion, and continued sternly: "I trust you informed Pauline that I would amply provide for her?" renewed sobbing was his only reply. "I have told you before, Augusta, that I do not approve of the partiality you show Joe; it is most unfair to Pauline, and causes constant dissension and unhappiness. It must stop."

"I'm sure I grant Pauline's every wish," exclaimed his wife, much aggrieved. "She has her own way, and plenty of clothes, jewels——"

"Speaking of jewels," broke in Calhoun-Cooper. "What has become of the emerald and diamond

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bracelet, which formerly belonged to my mother, the one I gave Pauline on her coming out? I haven't seen her wear it lately?"

His wife gulped back a sob, and wiped her eyes with a damp handkerchief. She also had missed the bracelet, and she had last seen it in Joe's hand, Pauline having carelessly left it on her mother's dressing table the night of their large dinner dance. Joe had admitted its beauty just before he went downstairs to assist his sister in welcoming their guests.

"I—I—it's at Galt's being mended," she stuttered; giving her husband the same excuse for its disappearance which she had made to Pauline. "I discovered some of the stones were loose."

Calhoun-Cooper contemplated her rapidly crimsoning face with misgiving. "Did you take the bracelet to Galt's?"

"Of course. I'll stop in and get it tomorrow," she rose precipitously. "How time flies! It's after three; I have barely time to get to the informal musicale Mrs. Fordyce is giving at four o'clock."

"Do you and Pauline see much of Marjorie Langdon?"

"Not more than we can help," snapped his wife, her temper getting the upper hand. "Neither Pauline nor I trust her——"

"Trust her? Exactly what do you mean by that term?"

Startled by the curtness of his tone, Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper stopped on her way to the door. "We feel

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that Marjorie Langdon is jealous of Pauline's friendship with Janet Fordyce, and is prejudicing her against us. I'll tell you more about our suspicion later, John; I must hurry now. Oh, dear, I don't believe I'm presentable!" getting a glimpse of her tear-stained face in the mirror, and turning she hastened from the room.

Calhoun-Cooper remained for some time at his desk; then, after consulting the telephone book, he rose, and giving a few directions to the butler, left the house and made his way to Madame Yvonett's residence.

Earlier in the afternoon Tom Nichols had left Fort Myer intending to call on Janet. Since his interview with Duncan two days before, he had received no message from Janet. In very desperation he had placed the bracelet in a box containing a bunch of violets and left it with the Fordyce butler the previous afternoon. Perkins had solemnly promised to give the box to Janet on her return, and with a lighter heart, Tom had returned to Fort Myer, fully expecting that Janet would call him up on the telephone. But she never did so. While deeply wounded by her silence, his longing to see her had finally conquered, and he motored to Washington that Sunday afternoon intent on demanding an explanation.

On approaching the Fordyce residence he noticed a number of motors and carriages driving up to the door, and thinking some entertainment was going on, he promptly turned his car about and made for his

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cousin's house in Thirteenth Street. Madame Yvonett would probably be able to give him news of Janet. On his arrival, to his great disgust, he found the Quakeress with a room full of callers, and it was fully an hour before they departed and he had her to himself.

"Draw up thy chair, Thomas," directed Madame Yvonett. "Where has thee been keeping thyself since Christmas?"

"Mostly at Myer. I've called you up on the telephone, Cousin Yvonett, several times to ask how you were."

"So Rebekah has told me, and I appreciate the trouble thee has taken. Will thee let me refill thy cup?"

"No more, thank you," setting down his empty tea-cup. "How is Marjorie?"

"Very busy just now; thee sees the season is in full swing, and she has little opportunity to come in, but I talk with her every day on the telephone."

"Have you seen Janet Fordyce recently," with elaborate carelessness, helping himself to a pretzel.

"She was here but yesterday, and inquired particularly——" Madame Yvonett stopped speaking as Minerva pulled back the hall portière and Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper walked into the room.

"I fear you do not recall me, Madame Yvonett," he said, as the Quakeress rose. "I am John Cooper, and I had the pleasure of calling upon you and your husband with my father years ago in Paris."

"Thee does my memory an injustice, Friend

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Cooper," exclaimed Madame Yvonett cordially. "I have a very agreeable recollection of thy father and thyself. But I admit thee has changed somewhat in appearance since those days. Does thee know my cousin, Thomas Nichols?"

"Oh, yes, the Captain and I are old acquaintances," shaking hands with Tom as he spoke. "What has become of you lately? My wife and Pauline tell me you have not been near them."

"My duties at Myer have increased recently; courts-martial, and all that," answered Tom, slightly embarrassed by the direct question. He had heard nothing further of his lost coin, and more than ever convinced that Joe had stolen it, he had kept away from the Calhoun-Coopers, disliking to accept their hospitality under the circumstances. "I hope your wife and daughter are both well," he added hastily.

"Very well, thanks." Calhoun-Cooper sat down near Madame Yvonett, and declining the cup of tea offered him, began speaking of Paris, and the Quakeress, enchanted at the allusion to the city and life she had loved so well, recounted amusing experiences of her sojourn in the French capital.

Tom took but little part in the conversation, and fidgeted uneasily. He was determined to find out from Madame Yvonett all that she could tell him about Janet, and waited with increasing impatience for Calhoun-Cooper to take his departure. But he found out-sitting the Representative a harder tax on his nervous system than he had bargained for.

"Thee brings back happy memories," said

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Madame Yvonett, with a half-sigh. "Must thee go?" as Calhoun-Cooper stood up, "I have enjoyed thy visit, friend; and if thee has an idle hour thee must come again."

"I will," promised Calhoun-Cooper, shaking hands warmly; then turning to the expectant Tom, he asked: "Walk uptown with me, Nichols, I am anxious to have a word with you."

Tom's face fell, and he was about to explain that he was obliged to return almost immediately to Fort Myer when Madame Yvonett answered for him.

"Go with Friend Cooper, Thomas," she said, "and return and have supper with me."

"Thanks, Cousin Yvonett, I will. I only hesitated, sir," addressing Calhoun-Cooper, "because I am not walking; but I'll be very happy to take you home in my car."

It was the Representative's turn to hesitate. "Suppose you leave me at the club instead," he said finally. "Good night, Madame Yvonett."

"Good night, friend," the Quakeress accompanied the two men to her front door. "Do not forget thee must come again soon."

"I certainly will," and raising his hat, Calhoun-Cooper stepped into the motor. He watched Madame Yvonett until she closed the door. "A gentlewoman of the old school, Nichols," he commented softly. "Cultured, brilliant, kindly——"

"She is that and then some," exclaimed Tom enthusiastically. "Cousin Yvonett is a brick."

Calhoun-Cooper smiled. "Hardly the expression

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I should have selected, but perhaps it covers my meaning." He said no more until the car drew up before his club. "Come in with me, Nichols, I am anxious to have an uninterrupted talk with you. I will detain you but a few minutes."

Barely waiting for Tom's assent, he strode into the club and led the way to a small unoccupied room and carefully closed the door. Tom took the chair pushed toward him, and waited with some uneasiness for his companion to explain why he wished to see him. He wondered if Calhoun-Cooper had heard of some of Joe's Washington escapades, and if he was to be catechised on the subject.

"Miss Marjorie Langdon is your cousin, is she not?" asked Calhoun-Cooper, breaking the silence.

"Yes; my second cousin, to be exact."

"Can you tell me where she procured the emerald and diamond bracelet which she pledged with the Justice of the Peace at Hyattsville . . . ?"

"Can I what?" exclaimed Tom, in profound astonishment.

Calhoun-Cooper repeated the question.

"May I ask what earthly business it is of yours?" demanded Tom.

"The bracelet happens to belong to my daughter, Pauline," was the calm reply.

Hardly able to believe his ears, Tom sat back in his chair and glared at Calhoun-Cooper.

"I was motoring down from Baltimore Christmas afternoon, and was arrested for speeding just after your release," continued the Representative,

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receiving no response from his dumfounded companion. "While paying my fine I saw and recognized Pauline's bracelet lying on the desk before the Justice of the Peace. He informed me it had been left there by Miss Marjorie Langdon." Tom's convulsive start was not lost on Calhoun-Cooper. "Will you kindly tell me how your cousin obtained possession of my daughter's bracelet?"

Tom stared stupidly at his questioner. "You're cra—crazy," he stuttered. "My cou—cousin left her—left her own bracelet with the Justice."

"She did no such thing," shortly. "I examined the bracelet carefully; it belonged to my mother before I gave it to my daughter, and her initials, my father's, and the date of the wedding are engraved on the inside of the bracelet. There was no possibility of my being mistaken. Did you redeem the bracelet?"

"Yes."

"Let me see it?" holding out his hand.

"I can't; I've returned it. . . ."

"In that case," slowly, "suppose we ask Miss Langdon for it."

Tom squirmed in his seat. Ask Marjorie? Then indeed the fat would be in the fire, and his promise to Janet to keep her presence at Hyattsville a profound secret would be broken. Marjorie would undoubtedly declare she had not been with him at Hyattsville.

"You must be mistaken about the bracelet, sir," he protested vehemently. "Call up and ask your daughter if she hasn't her own."

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"I asked her this morning, and she informed me it was not in her possession."

Tom turned white. What the devil was the man driving at? It *must* be Janet's bracelet; she would have been wearing none but her own that afternoon. A wealthy girl did not deck herself out in other people's jewelry.

"I intended seeing you before this, Nichols," continued Calhoun-Cooper, after an appreciable pause. "But I have been exceedingly busy for the past four days, and have had no opportunity to take up the matter of the bracelet until today. I not only prize the piece of jewelry for its association and money value, but I am determined to find out *how* that bracelet got out of my daughter's possession."

"What did your bracelet look like?"

Quickly Calhoun-Cooper told him, and Tom's heart sank; it was an accurate description of the one Janet had pledged with the Justice and he had later redeemed.

"Do you recognize it?" demanded the Representative, and Tom nodded a reluctant assent.

"They sound the same," he acknowledged cautiously. "But stranger coincidences have been known. Perhaps your daughter was also motoring on the Bladensburg Pike that afternoon."

"Don't be a fool!" retorted Calhoun-Cooper roughly. "That bracelet was stolen . . ."

"D—mn you!" Tom sprang for the other's throat.

"Take your hands off me!" thundered Calhoun-Cooper, struggling to free himself.

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"I'll make you eat those words first," and Tom's grasp tightened.

"I didn't say your cousin stole the bracelet," panted the other. "Have a little sense."

Slowly Tom released him, and the Representative straightened his rumpled collar and tie.

"Suppose you explain exactly what you are driving at," said Tom, resuming his seat.

Calhoun-Cooper did not reply at once. "I went to Madame Yvonett's intending to question her . . ."

"Good Lord!" broke in Tom.

"But on seeing that dear old Quakeress I couldn't do it," admitted Calhoun-Cooper. "I'm a great believer in caste, Nichols; no niece of Madame Yvonett's will go wrong. Ask Marjorie Langdon to tell you the truth about that bracelet, and I will believe every word she says."

"Thanks," mumbled Tom, at a loss for a longer answer.

"I will let you speak to Miss Langdon; she'll probably confide the whole matter to you," added Calhoun-Cooper, rising, and Tom followed his example. "But remember, if I don't get that bracelet back in two days with an adequate explanation, I'll go to Miss Langdon myself, and if necessary—to the police."

"That threat is not necessary," exclaimed Tom, his anger rising. "And speaking of making criminal investigations, sir; hadn't you better watch a member of your own family?"

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Calhoun-Cooper recoiled, and before he could recover from the emotion that mastered him, Tom was out of the club and into his roadster. As the car shot away into the darkness, Tom laid his head wearily on the steering wheel.

"In God's name," he mumbled, "how can I question the girl I adore as to how a piece of jewelry came into her possession?"

CHAPTER XVII

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN

MRS. FORDYCE awoke from her nap to discover Janet earnestly regarding her from the depths of a big tufted arm-chair.

"Bless me, Cutie!" she ejaculated. "Have I been asleep?"

"You certainly have," admitted Janet laughing. It was not often her mother called her by the familiar, schoolgirl nickname. "And snoring, too."

"Janet!"

"Well, just a little snore," hastily, noting her mother's offended expression. "I wouldn't have disturbed you, mumsie, dear, if I hadn't thought Marjorie was here with you. I am sorry my entrance awoke you."

"I have no business to be sleeping at this hour." Mrs. Fordyce shook herself more fully awake and glanced at the clock. "Are you not lunching with the Thayers' today?"

"Not going there until Saturday," shortly. "Thank goodness I'm having a little rest today."

"Are you tired, dear?"

"Sowewhat," reluctantly.

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"Then perhaps you had better give up going to the dance tonight——?"

"Miss the Charity Ball? Well, I guess not. Why, mumsie, they say that's the greatest fun ever."

"I was only thinking of your health; you and Marjorie have both gone out rather strenuously this past week, and Marjorie is showing the strain also."

"Then let her stay at home," calmly. "I'm quite capable of taking care of myself; and, mumsie, people are laughing at me for being tied to Marjorie's apron-strings."

"What people?"

"Oh, some of the girls," vaguely. "When you come down to it, mumsie, it is rather annoying to have to ask advice and instruction from a girl only a few years older than I."

Mrs. Fordyce looked troubled. "Has Marjorie been officious in any way?"

"N—no," reflectively. "But going to Marjorie for advice and seeing her presiding in your place isn't agreeable to me. I miss you, mumsie, dear."

"My baby girl!" Mrs. Fordyce crossed the room and gave her daughter a loving kiss and hug. "And I miss you; but, dearest, it is impossible for me to take part in the gay world, and I made this arrangement with Marjorie as the best way to further your interests and pleasure. Duncan tells me she is extremely popular and . . ."

"Oh, Duncan!" Janet shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "Duncan will tell you anything to keep Marjorie here—he's crazy about her."

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"What!" Mrs. Fordyce dropped back in her chair and gazed with astonished eyes at Janet.

"Haven't you noticed his infatuation?"

"Noticed it? Of course I haven't," with some sternness. "What meddlesome Mattie has been hinting such a thing?"

"My two eyes," tartly. "Hadn't you better be using yours, mumsie?"

"That will do; I will not permit impertinence."

"Well, if you will leave me under Marjorie's influence . . ."

"I have yet to see one act or word on Marjorie Langdon's part which you might not copy with impunity," declared Mrs. Fordyce with decision. "And I have been thrown with her even more than you. No, it is someone else who is responsible for your sudden—flippancy," hesitating for a word. A knock sounded on the boudoir door, and she called out: "Come in. Well, Perkins, what it is?" as the butler appeared in the doorway.

"Miss Calhoun-Cooper wishes to see Miss Janet a moment," he replied.

"Sit still, Janet," directed Mrs. Fordyce, as her daughter made a motion to rise. "Ask Miss Calhoun-Cooper to come up here, Perkins."

"I thought you didn't like Pauline?" said Janet in surprise, as the butler retreated down the hall to the elevator.

"You have just convinced me that I am leaving you too much with others, Janet," dryly. "Hereafter I shall take pains to see more of your friends."

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Good morning," as Pauline entered the room. "You are very good to come upstairs."

"The idea of putting it that way, dear Mrs. Fordyce." Pauline shook hands effusively with her, and kissed Janet warmly. "Please don't let me disturb you; I only stopped to ask if Janet would care to go with me to see Kellar, the magician, on Friday afternoon."

"Of course I will," exclaimed Janet, heartily. "Thanks so much; I dote on Kellar."

"Then you have seen him before?"

"Yes, a number of years ago. He's sure to have some new tricks by this time; I had no idea he was coming to Washington."

"Kellar is only giving this one matinée performance. Do you think your brother would care to go?"

"I'm sure he would; I'll ask him," rising hurriedly.

"Duncan is out just now," put in Mrs. Fordyce. "He telephoned he would lunch at the club."

"I'll let you know as soon as he comes in," promised Janet, dropping down on the sofa beside Pauline.

"You are very good to invite my girl and boy," said Mrs. Fordyce. "I thank you for giving them so much pleasure."

"The pleasure is mine," insisted Pauline, lending undue emphasis to the hackneyed phrase. "I regret I was only able to get four seats together, Janet, and therefore cannot ask Miss Langdon to accompany us. Captain Nichols has already promised to make the fourth in our small party."

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"We have not seen much of Captain Nichols lately," commented Mrs. Fordyce.

"Nor we," answered Pauline. "I met him just as I was leaving the theater this morning, and asked him then and there, to my relief, for it is almost impossible to get him on the telephone. He tells me his quarters are not connected with the post 'phone, and he has to go to the officers' club to get and send messages."

"What keeps him so busy?" Janet examined Pauline's jewel-studded gold mesh bag with open admiration.

"When I taxed him with not calling, he said his official duties had kept him tied to Fort Myer. That excuse covers his not visiting us"—with an affected laugh, "but of course, there's another reason for his not calling here. . . ."

"And pray, what is that?" demanded Mrs. Fordyce, eyeing her daughter's flushed countenance intently.

"A lover's quarrel with—Marjorie Langdon." Pauline pronounced the name with much impressiveness. If she heard Janet's sudden, sharply drawn breath, she gave no sign.

"Captain Nichols and Marjorie!" exclaimed Mrs. Fordyce in bewilderment. "You surprise me. I never knew he was attentive to *her*."

"I suppose his relationship covers his attentions to the casual observer," went on Pauline thoughtfully. "How nearly related are they?"

"I believe he is Marjorie's second cousin," an-

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swered Janet in a voice she strove to make indifferent.

"So there's no bar to their marriage; except I believe, Miss Langdon does not fancy love in a cottage."

"You do Marjorie an injustice," announced Mrs. Fordyce quietly. "If her affections were really engaged, I don't think she would hesitate to make any sacrifice."

"I hope your good opinion of her is justified." Pauline flushed at the rebuke, which Mrs. Fordyce's manner more than her words, conveyed. "Miss Langdon has gained a reputation for mercenary selfishness."

"Poverty is apt to teach one the value of money," replied Mrs. Fordyce. "Still, that is different from being staring and stark mad; and I for one shall give Marjorie the benefit of the doubt. Every cent of money she has, she lavishes on her aunt, Madame Yvonett; that does not look to me like 'mercenary selfishness.' "

"Miss Langdon is fortunate to have you for a friend," Pauline rose. "And I am afraid she needs them, poor girl; people are not always prepossessed in her favor." Her voice expressed deep commiseration, and Mrs. Fordyce felt inclined to box her ears. Accustomed to being accorded every deference by her family, and protected by her seclusion from contact with the free and easy manner of the younger generation to their elders, she deeply resented Pauline's flouting address and flippant style.

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Pauline, busy adjusting her furs, missed the disapproving look cast in her direction, and turning to Janet, asked: "Will I see you at the ball tonight?"

"Yes, we expect to go." Some of the enthusiasm of the morning had gone from the fresh young voice, and again Mrs. Fordyce covertly studied her daughter. What had come over Janet?

"Your box is next ours," continued Pauline, lingering near the sofa. "Mrs. Walbridge is on our other side. Mother always insists on finding out who our neighbors will be before purchasing tickets for charitable entertainments."

"As a health precaution?" inquired Mrs. Fordyce. "Or is it a question of social prestige?"

"Both," acknowledged Pauline quickly. "So many things are catching these days, we don't like to come in contact with—dirt." And her meaning smile deepened as she saw Mrs. Fordyce flinch; she had scored at last. "We all have our idiosyncrasies, dear Mrs. Fordyce; good-bye. Don't trouble to come downstairs with me, Janet, I can find my way out alone."

"Of course I'm coming with you." Janet followed her friend out of the room, leaving her mother sitting in her chair in a brown study. She was aroused almost immediately by Janet's re-entrance.

"What an odious creature!" she shivered. "Upon my word, Janet, what's the world coming to? Are there no ladies any more?"

"Now don't be old-fashioned," Janet threw her-

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self down pettishly on the sofa. "Can you give me some money, mumsie?"

"What has become of your father's Christmas check?"

"Spent," laconically. "I can't help it, mumsie; money just evaporates in this old town. I just want to buy a—a—new bracelet," glancing down deprecatingly at her bare wrist.

"You have a careless hand, Janet," said her mother reprovingly. "However, I cannot have you want for anything. Will a check for fifty dollars do?"

"Oh, yes; thank you, darling," beaming gratefully upon her mother. "But instead of a check, could you give me——" she stopped as some one rapped on the door. In response to Mrs. Fordyce's bidding, Marjorie stepped into the room.

"Am I late?" she asked, laying a bundle of papers on the table beside Mrs. Fordyce.

"Twenty-five minutes ahead of luncheon," answered Janet shortly.

"What have you here, Marjorie?" Mrs. Fordyce put her hand on the papers.

"Receipted bills," Marjorie drew up her chair and sorted the papers carefully.

"The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker," quoted Mrs. Fordyce, busily inspecting Marjorie. She saw her through new eyes, the eyes of a mother judging a possible daughter-in-law. Suddenly, she pressed her fingers against her eyes; the lids were wet with tears.

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"If I were you, I would stop dealing with Jackson," announced Marjorie, finding the particular bill she was searching for. "He calmly sent in an unitemized account, calling for seventy-five dollars, and when I insisted on going over his books, we found he had overcharged you eighteen dollars. I gave him the check Mr. Fordyce had made out for the larger sum on condition that he refund me the eighteen dollars. Here it is," tumbling the money out on the table.

"You won't be popular with the cook, Marjorie, if you have interfered with her rake-off," snapped Janet. "What's a few dollars to father?"

"Janet!" Mrs. Fordyce spoke in a tone that Marjorie had never heard before, and her daughter on but one other occasion. "You forget yourself strangely this morning; apologize at once to Marjorie for your unnecessary remark."

"I meant no offense to Marjorie," protested Janet. "I merely intended to say, it was silly of her to interfere after things have been bought and paid for."

"Your explanation strikes me as being worse than the offense," Mrs. Fordyce was thoroughly aroused, and not heeding Marjorie's attempt to restore peace, added, "I am grateful to Marjorie for saving me from a swindler; apparently you think because the amount is small that I should submit to being robbed. Let me tell you, Janet, that no one is so rich that he can stand being fleeced, and any woman who knowingly permits graft in her kitchen is worse than

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a fool. Never let me hear you again advocate condoning knavery."

Janet bowed before the storm. "I won't, mother," meekly. "Indeed, Marjorie, I did not mean to insult you in any way."

"I am sure you didn't," answered Marjorie, more puzzled than hurt by Janet's peculiar manner; they had been from their first meeting sworn allies and good comrades. "Please think no more about it, dear."

"What dirty money!" Mrs. Fordyce withdrew her hand from the table hastily. "Do take it away."

"With pleasure," laughed Janet, recovering somewhat her usually sunny disposition, and she was about to gather up the soiled bank notes when her mother stopped her.

"No, you ~~must~~ not touch them," she declared, and Marjorie opened her eyes at her vehemence. "I will have Calderon send them to the Treasury to be redeemed."

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said Perkins from behind the half-open door. "Captain Nichols is at the telephone and wishes to speak to——"

"Me, Perkins?" and Janet sprang to her feet.

"No, Miss Janet, he asked for Miss Langdon."

"Won't you take the message for me, Janet?" inquired Marjorie, laying a paper-weight over the receipted bills.

"No, certainly not," and Janet disappeared from the room.

"Pay no attention to her whims," advised Mrs.

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Fordyce kindly. "I'll go over the accounts with you later; don't keep Captain Nichols waiting."

Marjorie found Tom exceedingly curt on the telephone, and she hung up the receiver a few seconds later, wondering what under the sun induced everyone to become so ill-tempered all of a sudden. As she walked through the dining-room after leaving the pantry, where she had gone to answer the telephone in preference to disturbing Mr. Calderon Fordyce in his library, she encountered Janet pouring out a glass of ice water.

"What did your cousin want?" she asked.

"He said he would be unable to dine here to-night. . . ."

"Does he think we run a hotel," Janet was pale with anger, "that he breaks our invitations at will? How dare he treat us so cavalierly!"

"Stop!" Marjorie's authoritative voice, though low-pitched, brought the furious girl to her senses. "Captain Nichols intends no disrespect to your family or to you; in fact, he highly appreciates your kindness and hospitality."

"Then why doesn't he come here?"

"He told me to tell you that he had received an invitation to dine at the White House, and therefore had to cancel his engagement here, to his great regret. He will join us later at the Charity Ball."

"I see," Janet's face altered. "I understand now, please say nothing . . ."

"Certainly not," and Marjorie, seeing that Janet

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obviously desired to be alone, made her way thoughtfully to her room.

Once there she lost no time in getting out her calling costume preparatory to a hurried toilet after luncheon. On reaching up for her hat which she kept on the top shelf in her closet, she knocked down a cherished florist's box and out tumbled a withered bunch of violets. With an exclamation of annoyance, she stooped to pick up the petals and dried leaves, and her fingers closed over cold metal. Considerably startled, Marjorie retreated to the window and examined what she held in her hand. It was a beautiful emerald and diamond bracelet which was carefully secured about the short stems of the bouquet.

Marjorie gazed at it in complete bewilderment; then going over to the closet, she picked up the box and its cover. It bore the florist's name from whom Duncan had sent her a corsage bouquet some days before; but certainly when she wore the violets and afterward put them away for safe keeping no bracelet had encircled the stems.

More and more startled Marjorie returned to the window, and inspected the bracelet with minute care. The unique design seemed oddly familiar. With great difficulty she finally deciphered the initials on the inside: "S. P."—"J. C. C."—"Jan. 14, 1844."

"S. P.—J. C. C." she repeated thoughtfully. "J. C. C.—where have I heard—Heavens! J. Calhoun-Cooper—of course, I've seen Pauline wear the bracelet. How did it get here?" She looked at the

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beautiful bauble with increasing horror, as her ever-present fear supplied an answer to her question.

"God help Janet if Pauline ever finds out who took her bracelet," she groaned. "She will meet no mercy there."

CHAPTER XVIII

LIGHT-FINGERED GENTRY

TOM NICHOLS passed down the long line of the receiving party at the Charity Ball and paused near the north end of the New Willard ballroom and looked about him. The floor was thronged with dancers, and from where he stood it was impossible to make out the occupants of the boxes which lined the length of the room on both sides. He waited for some minutes, hoping that at the end of the dance he would be able to walk about the floor, but the music was continuous, the Marine Band breaking into a fox trot when the Engineer Band at the opposite end of the room, ceased playing. He shouldered his way through the waiting men, and dodging between the dancers, he walked down the room as best he could, and reaching the center spied Marjorie and Janet sitting in their box with several friends. In a few seconds he joined them.

"Better late than never, Tom," exclaimed Marjorie gaily. "You're a sight for sair e'en. Janet dear, here is Captain Nichols."

"Oh, how are you," Janet paused long enough in her conversation with Baron von Valkenburg to take

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Tom's hand, then deliberately turned her back on him.

Tom's lips were compressed in a hard line as he bowed to Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper, who was occupying an adjoining seat in the next box, and leaning across the brass railing which divided them, he conversed for a short time with her. A movement in his own box caused him to turn back, and he discovered Janet on the point of leaving. He stepped in front of her deliberately.

"My dance, Miss Janet," he announced. A quick denial sprang to her lips, only to be checked by the quiet confidence of his manner. Tom encountered von Valkenberg's astonished stare over her shoulder, and addressed him directly. "Sorry, Baron, to disappoint you, but Miss Janet promised me this dance some time ago; come," and with care he assisted Janet down the few steps leading to the floor.

So congested was the dancing that after circling the room once Tom stopped his partner near the entrance to the small ballroom and led her inside it.

"Suppose we sit over there," he said pointing to some chairs at the farther corner of the room. "There is no pleasure in dancing with such a mob on the floor."

"It's much cooler here," volunteered Janet, a few minutes later, breaking a pause which threatened to become awkward.

"Yes," absently.

Janet glanced askance at Tom. She had longed

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to see him, and now that he was by her side, she was tongue-tied. She knew that every instant spent in Tom's society would arouse Barnard's jealous rage, but forbidden fruit was sweet.

"Why did you boast of our motor trip to Hyattsville?" she blurted out.

"I, boast of it? I never mentioned it to a soul!" If she had exploded a firecracker before Tom, he could not have been more astounded. "I swear I never told anyone," he added, with vigor, and her aching heart was comforted.

"I believe you," she answered, with such trust kindling her shy regard that Tom hitched his chair closer to her side.

"Did you really think I had betrayed your precious confidence in me?" Janet shook her head.

"I couldn't, just couldn't, believe it," she admitted.

"You darling!" Tom's hand sought hers. "Who dared to say I boasted of such a thing?"

"As long as you didn't do it, the rest doesn't matter," declared Janet, with true feminine logic, and changed the subject abruptly. "Was it fun at the White House?"

"I'd have enjoyed it more if I hadn't wanted to be elsewhere," admitted Tom truthfully. "An invitation to the White House is final—to an army or navy officer; I couldn't decline it, no previous engagement plea goes. I hope you understand. . . ."

"Oh, quite," Janet was nervously playing with her fan. "But there have been other times when you

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might have co—when the White House wouldn't have interfered with your coming to—to—see me."

"Only your wish kept me away."

"My wish?" Startled, Janet faced toward him.

"Certainly; how else was I to construe your silence?"

"My silence!" indignantly. "Did you want me to cry from the house-tops that I wished to see you?"

"Such an extreme measure was not necessary," retorted Tom stiffly. "An answer to my message would have been sufficient."

"I never received any message from you."

"What! Why, I told your brother to ask you to telephone when I could call and see you?"

"He never told me—only mentioned you were to dine with us tonight——"

"That's the limit!" Tom banged his sword-hilt with his fist. "Not getting any reply from you I jumped to the conclusion you were tired of seeing me."

"For a soldier you're mighty easily discouraged," taunted Janet, her spirits rising as the misgivings and doubts of the past few days gave way before Tom's explanations.

"Never again," vowed Tom. "Next time I'll storm the citadel. But joking aside," dropping his bantering tone. "I did try to see you; called several times, telephoned—but you were always out. I finally decided it was intentional; thought you wanted to drop me."

"How could you be so unjust!" Janet's reproach-

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ful look caused Tom's heart to beat more rapidly under his blue uniform. "I am always loyal to my friends. You won't back out of dining with us tomorrow night?"

"What a way to put it?" Tom made a slight grimace. "Of course, I'm coming, and I'll count the hours until then."

"The day after Christmas I waited in for you the whole afternoon and evening, and you never came," continued Janet plaintively.

"I couldn't get away from Myer that afternoon, and had to wait until Friday before going to Hyattsville to redeem your bracelet. By the way that bracelet is very beautiful," lowering his voice. "The emeralds and diamonds are exceptionally fine, and the workmanship exquisite."

"I am so glad your taste coincides with mine," said Janet, with a quick coquettish glance upward. "I couldn't bear to lose the bracelet; it is so unique."

Tom stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Have you ever seen another bracelet like it?" he questioned at length. A keen glance accompanied the words, but Janet was watching the distant dancers, and her expression conveyed nothing to him.

"N—no, I don't believe I have," she replied slowly, and Tom's heart sank. "It's unusual appearance is one of its beauties to me. Have you my bracelet with you?"

"Have I?" in profound astonishment. "No." then seeing her disappointed look, he asked sharply. "Why should you expect me to have your bracelet?"

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"Who else would have it?" her eyes opening wider. "Didn't you redeem it for me?"

"Of course I did, but I left it at your house on Saturday."

"Left it at my house?" she half rose, then sank back again in her chair. "I have never received it."

"What! Didn't you find it in the box of violets?"

"Violets? I never received any violets from you."

"You didn't?" Tom's bewilderment was so pronounced that Janet took fright.

"D—do you think the florist stole the bracelet?" she demanded breathlessly.

"No, he couldn't have. I bought the violets at Small's, took them with me in my motor, and on a side street opened the box and slipped the bracelet over the stems, where you couldn't fail to see it. I left the box at your house myself."

Janet looked at him queerly. "Ah, indeed; and with which member of the household did you leave it?"

"I gave it to Perkins, and he promised to deliver it to you immediately on your return."

"He never gave it to me."

Tom rose. "I'll go straight up to your house and ask him for it."

"No, no." She laid a restraining hand on his sword hilt. "He is probably in bed by now; mother's so thoughtful for her servants, she lets them retire early when I'm out with Duncan; he always has his latchkey. I'll ask Perkins first thing in the morning."

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"And will you let me know the results?" Tom resumed his seat. "I shall be on tenter-hooks until I know the bracelet is safely in your hands. I feel responsible, you know; if it's lost. . . ."

"Nonsense," noting his worried air. "Bracelets have disappeared before; don't take it to heart."

"Can you tell me which jewelry shop it came from —?"

It was some moments before she replied. "It was an antique."

Tom's heart grew heavy again. At every question he ran into a blank wall. How was he ever to disprove Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper's absurd statement unless he had something tangible to work on. The bracelet was surely bewitched by some evil genius.

"An antique? That's hard luck," he answered finally. "If it is really lost through my carelessness in trusting a servant, I shall want to replace it. . . ."

"You mustn't think of such a thing," vehemently.

"Oh, but I insist. You draw the design and I'll have it made."

"I shouldn't think of letting you go to all that expense," protested Janet.

"To think I made you lose an ornament you value!" groaned Tom. "I, who would move heaven and earth to spare you the slightest . . ." but Janet never waited for him to complete the sentence; she had caught sight of Chichester Barnard standing in the doorway talking to Mrs. Walbridge. His back was turned to them; it was just possible that he

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had not seen that she was with Tom. She sprang to her feet.

"Do forgive me," she whispered hurriedly. "Marjorie has just waved to me; I must go. Please don't follow me." And before the startled officer could even get to his feet she had darted across the floor and out of the room, and brought up breathless beside Mrs. Walbridge.

"No sign of late hours in these rosy cheeks," commented the latter, touching Janet's scarlet face with her gloved finger. "She needs no beauty sleep."

"Indeed, no," agreed Barnard. "But I'm going to be selfish enough to ask Miss Janet to sit out a dance with me," laying his hand with an air of possession on her arm which enlightened sentimental Mrs. Walbridge.

"Run along," she directed, interrupting Janet's hasty protests. "I was young once myself. Don't bother to wait for me. My husband will get me some fruit punch."

Reluctantly Janet walked toward her box, Barnard in close attendance. In her desire not to have him see her with Tom, she had given him an opening for a quiet chat with her alone—unless Marjorie was in their box. But Marjorie, attended by Baron von Valkenburg, had gone "visiting" in a neighboring box, and Duncan was dancing with Pauline Calhoun-Cooper. Janet prayed that Barnard was in a pleasant mood; she had grown to dread his uncertain temper. He could be so charming when he wanted

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to. Her heart was fluttering like a caged bird as she preceded Barnard into the empty box; she dared not offend him, and she dreaded more scenes.

"I hear congratulations are in order," she began.

"For what?"

"On your inheritance."

"Oh, that!" Barnard spoke as if it were a mere bagatelle. "I may be a long time getting it; settling an estate is tedious work. Aunt Margaret was angelic to remember me in her will, and I am doubly grateful, because, when I receive the inheritance I can lavish it all on you, my darling," bending toward her, but a loud burst of laughter from the Calhoun-Cooper box caused him to look in that direction. Janet moved her chair imperceptibly nearer the brass railing and away from his side.

"On second's thought I don't believe I'll let you spend any of your inheritance on me," she remarked thoughtfully, as he turned back to her. The pupils of his eyes contracted, and Janet was conscious of a feeling akin to repulsion.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I'm not good enough for you, Chichester," she stammered. "You should marry a woman of brilliant mental attainments—a woman of the world—I'm only an unformed schoolgirl."

"You have too modest an opinion of yourself," he protested with passionate ardor. "It's your freshness, your originality which I adore. My bonnie lassie and her susceptible heart!" His voice and eyes caressed her, and a warmer color suffused her

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cheeks. "I'm not half good enough for you, but such as I am, I am your slave always."

"Always!" she echoed, and Barnard leaned forward to look more closely at her, but she avoided his direct gaze, and concentrated her attention on the dancers on the floor beneath them.

All Washington apparently was present to aid the pet charity for which the ball was annually given, and men and women in every condition of life were enjoying the entertainment. High government officials, diplomats, leaders of the ultra-smart set, and members of the resident circle vied with each other to make the ball a success. Janet scanned the opposite boxes in which sat beautifully gowned women, whose superb jewels glittered in the rays of the hundreds of electric lights.

"My darling!" She jumped nervously, and held up a protesting hand.

"Hush!" she cautioned. "Don't forget Mrs. J. Calhoun-Cooper is sitting near us, and she may overhear . . ."

"Why doesn't she go away," muttered Barnard disgustedly. "Lately, I seldom have you to myself. If I was of a suspicious nature, I might think it was intentional"—Janet squirmed in her chair, and after contemplating her a moment in smiling satisfaction, Barnard again inspected Mrs. J. Calhoun-Cooper. "She looks like an Indian begum."

"Don't be so unkind in your criticism," with an effort Janet summoned a careless smile. "Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's gown is a creation."

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"Hum! the modiste has left most of the surface to be covered by jewels—cold comfort tonight. Don't you want your scarf over your shoulders?"

"No, thank you; I am still warm from dancing." Janet's eyes again sought the throng below her. "I wonder where Marjorie is—and Duncan. Oh, look, who is the pretty woman dancing with Joe Calhoun-Cooper?"

Barnard glanced in the direction she indicated, and his eyebrows rose suggestively. "No one you are likely to know, lady bird. How fearfully they dance."

"She is graceful," declared Janet. "But Joe—nothing could make him so."

"Women take to the new-fangled dances better than the men," grumbled Barnard. "Give me the old-fashioned waltz and two-step every time. Even the music has deteriorated; no melody any more. Listen to that," as the Marine Band burst into a popular tune, "nothing to be heard but the big drum, it drowns every other instrument—hark!"

"But I don't want to hear it," she objected. "Let us talk instead."

"That is just what we can't do—the big drum sounds distinct and clear; listen—!"

Mrs. J. Calhoun-Cooper's ever busy eyes had also noted the pretty woman with whom Joe was dancing, and a displeased frown marked her forehead. She was about to send one of her guests after Joe with a message that she desired his presence, when she observed Marjorie Langdon approaching. Joe and



“Barnard again inspected Mrs. J. Calhoun-Cooper. ‘She looks like an Indian begum.’”

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the general principles of the theory of the structure of the human mind.

2. The second part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the general principles of the theory of the structure of the human mind.

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his pretty partner stopped dancing near the latter, and Marjorie, recognizing Kathryn Allen, stepped forward and held out her hand, but no sign of recognition lighted the nurse's face, and after inspecting Marjorie with marked insolence she cut her dead. Mrs. J. Calhoun-Cooper, an interested spectator of the little drama, thrilled with satisfaction as she caught the hot resentment that flamed in Marjorie's face. Controlling herself, Marjorie stepped back out of the crowd and came face to face with Duncan Fordyce.

"I don't know where you've been keeping yourself," he said, "but I searched both ballrooms and haven't found a sign of you until now."

"I haven't been dancing," she sighed rather wearily. "Mrs. Burns asked me to sit in her box for a while; I am on my way back to Janet now to arrange about going down to supper."

"Let us have one dance first," pleaded Duncan, and taking silence for consent, he slipped his arm about her waist and they threaded a way through the other dancers.

Pushing unpleasant thoughts to one side, Marjorie surrendered herself wholly to the pleasure of the moment. The pressure of Duncan's strong arm gave her a sense of protection which soothed her jagged nerves unutterably, and she danced almost without being conscious of the people around her. Duncan's gaze sought her face so persistently that they had several narrow escapes from bad collisions. They were turning a corner near the entrance to the small

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ballroom when they caromed violently into a man who was striving to make his way down the room, and shot him against the side of one of the boxes.

"I beg your pardon," apologized Duncan and Marjorie in concert, and the stranger, recovering his equilibrium, stared fixedly at Duncan.

"Nice way to treat old friends," he began, but got no further.

"Paul Potter! by all that's glorious!" shouted Duncan, seizing his hand and wringing it hard. "Where did you drop from?"

"New York, stopping with Judge and Mrs. Walbridge. I tried to telephone you"—he stopped out of breath.

"Miss Langdon, let me present Dr. Paul Potter, of San Francisco," broke in Duncan, and Marjorie found herself looking into the most piercing eyes she had ever seen in human head, as her hand was taken in a firm clasp.

"Very glad to meet you, Miss Langdon," said the physician cordially. "I'm sorry to have interrupted your dance."

"We were on the point of stopping——" she began.

"Not so that I could notice it," and Dr. Potter's eyes twinkled.

"I am afraid we were exceeding the speed limit," acknowledged Duncan. "Come over to our box, Paul, and sit with us."

"I can't, old man, I must be getting back to Mrs. Walbridge; she is anxious to go down to supper."

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"Perhaps we can get a table together. Come on, I'll ask Mrs. Walbridge, her box is near ours."

Marjorie accompanied the two men to the steps leading to the boxes, but on approaching the one occupied by Mrs. Walbridge she turned and addressed Duncan.

"I won't wait for you," she said, "but will join Janet at once."

"Very well, I'll be along in a minute," and Marjorie hastened down the narrow aisle alone.

Janet and Chichester Barnard were still sitting as close as the chairs permitted in the corner of the box, their heads almost touching as they whispered together, and Marjorie's eyes narrowed as she took in the tableau. She had watched Janet dancing with Tom with a contented mind, and the last she had seen of Barnard he was dancing attendance on Mrs. Walbridge.

"Well, good people, thinking of supper?" she inquired, and noticed with an odd sensation Janet's flushed face and embarrassed manner as she turned to meet her.

"Our thoughts are not so material," protested Barnard easily.

"N—no?" and the faint irony of her tone was not lost on Barnard's keen susceptibilities.

"Who was the little man walking down the room with you and Duncan, Marjorie?" questioned Janet hurriedly. "His face looked familiar."

"Dr. Potter, of San Francisco."

"Of course; how stupid of me not to recognize

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him, he once attended mother," in a hurried aside as her brother and Tom entered the box.

"Going down to supper?" asked Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper, attracted by her neighbors' preparations for leaving.

"Yes," replied Marjorie shortly.

"Then suppose we join forces," ignoring the lack of cordiality in Marjorie's manner. "Kindly hand me my scarf." Her overbearing tone brought the carmine to Marjorie's cheeks, and a hot retort was on her lips when, thinking better of it, she mastered her indignation. Stooping she picked up the gold and silver Coronation scarf which had fallen inside their box, and laid it across Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's bare expanse of shoulder.

"All ready?" questioned Duncan, inspecting his small party. "Then come on."

Once in the crowded dining-room on the ground floor of the New Willard, Marjorie thanked a kindly Providence which ordained that the tables were too small to accommodate the Calhoun-Cooper party and her own, and she saw them depart to another quarter of the room with inward joy. Barnard, silently resenting that he was the fifth spoke in the wheel, left them, and joined another group of friends, and Duncan, contemplating his sister and Tom already deep in conversation, gave his undivided attention to Marjorie. They were none of them conscious of the tardiness of the service, or the flight of time, and Tom gave voice to genuine regret

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as they finally rose from the table and made their way to the lift.

"Why do good times have to end?" he grumbled. "I don't know when I have enjoyed myself so much."

"It has been fun," agreed Janet softly, secretly longing to linger beside the distinguished-looking young officer. "Shall we see you at dinner tomorrow?"

"You bet!" he whispered, with emphasis.

"Go ahead, Janet," Duncan's strong arm propelled his sister forward. "Don't you see the lift is waiting?"

As Marjorie and Tom started to follow them some new arrivals pushed rudely between, and an instant later, the packed elevator shot upward.

"Never mind, we'll catch the next one," said Tom consolingly, as he darted to the second shaft. "It's coming down now." They waited impatiently for the passengers in the elevator to step out in the square hall, then entered and found they had the lift to themselves. The elevator boy was about to release the lever, when the starter tapped on the glass partition, and throwing open the door, permitted Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper to step inside.

"Good evening, sir," said Marjorie cordially.

"Oh, how do you do," replied Calhoun-Cooper, somewhat taken aback on recognizing his companions. He barely nodded to Tom, whose greeting was equally curt; and Marjorie, becoming aware of

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the apparently strained relations between the two men, broke the awkward silence.

"I am afraid you are too late to see the ball at its height," she said.

"I couldn't get here any earlier," answered Calhoun-Cooper. "Have you seen my wife and daughter this evening?"

"Yes; they finished supper before we did, and have already gone back to the ballroom."

Calhoun-Cooper, who had been watching Marjorie with peculiar intentness, wheeled on Tom.

"My congratulations, Captain," he said sardonically. "You executed my commission with commendable quickness."

"I don't catch your meaning, sir," retorted Tom frigidly.

"The bracelet was returned to me this evening. My thanks to you—both," and bowing he turned to the door as the boy brought the lift to a stop.

Under the shock of his words Tom and Marjorie stood stock still, eying one another in complete bewilderment, while one question raced through the brains of both: what did the other know of the lost bracelet?

"All out," exclaimed the elevator boy insistently, as he rolled back the door, and Marjorie, recovering herself first, followed Calhoun-Cooper into the reception hall out of which opened the large ballroom and cloak-rooms.

Just as Calhoun-Cooper started for the ballroom,

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Pauline crossed the threshold, and seeing her father, stopped short.

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed, making no effort to lower her penetrating voice. "Mother's pearl necklace has been stolen from her."

CHAPTER XIX

FALSE WITNESS

MARJORIE handed the menu back to the chef, gave him the completed marketing list, added a few instructions, and made her way to the boudoir. There was no buoyancy in her step, and she looked wretchedly ill as she crossed the threshold into the sun-lit room. If Mrs. Fordyce had not been deeply immersed in her own condition, she could hardly have failed to observe the deep circles under Marjorie's eyes, and the hectic flush in each white cheek. Her sleepless night had left its telltale mark.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Fordyce?" asked Marjorie, walking over to the couch on which the older woman was lying propped up with pillows.

"Better, thank you; if this old heart of mine only stops palpitating I will be up and about again in no time. Sit down by me, dear," and Marjorie took a chair by the couch.

"Don't you think I had better call off the dinner tonight?" she said.

"No, indeed," with emphasis. "These heart attacks are not serious." Marjorie, perceiving the blueness of her lips and her gray pallor, thought

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differently, and her heart ached for her gentle benefactress. She longed to take Mrs. Fordyce into her confidence, to tell her all her doubts and fears; but how could she tell the story of the thefts implicating Janet to the mother who adored her? "Janet has set her heart on having this dinner, and I cannot disappoint the child," went on Mrs. Fordyce.

"But I don't think Janet will enjoy entertaining while you are ill," said Marjorie.

"Tut! Just an indisposition; don't alarm the child," sharply.

"I wouldn't think of doing it," protested Marjorie. "I only feared the sound of the guests' voices might disturb you."

"Not a bit of it; this house is soundproof," smiled Mrs. Fordyce. "There was a time when I reveled in dinners and dances; now I have to take my fun by proxy—don't begrudge me the crumbs."

"Oh, Mrs. Fordyce!" Marjorie's shocked voice brought another smile to her companion's lips.

"There, there, dearie," she patted Marjorie's hand affectionately. "Don't worry about a worn-out shell. Calderon has sent for a trained nurse; not that I need one, but the idea seemed to give him some comfort."

"And of course you agreed."

"Naturally; when you are married, my dear, you will soon discover that matrimony is made up of mutual concessions; that is, if you wish to stay married to the same man. Tell me, is there any truth in the report of your engagement . . ."

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fingers tightened on the hand she was holding, then slowly loosened . . . "to Captain Nichols?"

"Tom!" Her surprise was so pronounced that Mrs. Fordyce smiled to herself. "Why, he's just like an elder brother."

"Ah, then you are heart-whole and fancy free?" But Marjorie treated the sentence as a remark and not as a question, and Mrs. Fordyce continued pleasantly. "Enough of intimate affairs today. Will you go through the morning mail and use your judgment about the answers to the invitations?"

Marjorie picked up the pile of letters on the table and rose.

"Are you——?" she stumbled in her speech, and Mrs. Fordyce eyed her in some surprise. "Are you quite satisfied with me?" and under her lingerie waist her heart pounded painfully as she awaited Mrs. Fordyce's answer which was somewhat long in coming.

"Absolutely satisfied," acknowledged Mrs. Fordyce, and the smile accompanying the words almost broke down Marjorie's composure. Stooping, she kissed her warmly, and when she looked up some of the brightness had returned to her face. "I have absolute confidence in you," added Mrs. Fordyce quietly. "Run along now, dear, and come back when you have finished answering the letters."

Lighter at heart Marjorie hastened to the library, but on opening the door, she discovered Mr. Calderon Fordyce busy at his desk, and without disturbing him, she slipped back into the hall and sought

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the drawing-room. Going over to the *boule cabinet*, which she on several occasions had used in an emergency, she proceeded to open and sort Mrs. Fordyce's correspondence, frequently making entries and looking up dates in an engagement book which she had brought with her. The last letter was in a handwriting which she recognized, and wondering why Mrs. Arnold should send a second invitation to the same person in the same mail, she tore open the envelope.

DEAR MRS. FORDYCE, [she read],

I am just sending a formal invitation to your daughter to our dinner dance at the Country Club, and I do hope that she can come. I will see that Miss Fordyce is properly chaperoned. Miss Langdon's presence will not be necessary . . .

Marjorie dropped the letter and stared vacantly before her. Five days previously Mrs. Arnold had gushingly invited her to the dinner dance, telling her that a written invitation would be sent to her shortly, and begging her not to forget the engagement. What did the sudden change of front portend? "Miss Langdon"—heretofore Mrs. Arnold, a leader in the young married set, had always addressed her as "Marjorie."

Putting the letter back in its envelope, Marjorie commenced an answer to a luncheon invitation, and completing it, hurriedly folded the notepaper, only to discover that the back sheet was partially written on. With an exclamation of annoyance, she caught

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it up and ran her eyes over the clear back-hand, her mind subconsciously taking in the meaning of the written words:

DEAR CAPTAIN NICHOLS:

I am sending this by special delivery, as I want you to get it without fail [heavily underscored]. Perkins tells me he had to go out and gave your violets to Annie, the chamber maid. Annie says she placed the box in the dressing-room as it was cooler there and she thought the flowers would keep better. She knows nothing more of the matter, did not tell me of the flowers because she thought they would be found by me or Marjorie Langdon . . .

A bad blot finished the sentence, and explained why the sheet had been discarded.

Marjorie sat stunned, too confused, at first to puzzle out the significance of the unfinished note, which was in Janet's unmistakable handwriting. Then she rose, stumbled over to the broad sofa, and curling up in one corner, pillowed her head on her arms, and gave herself up to elucidating the enigma;—but the more she thought the more nonplussed she became.

Janet's note indicated that Tom Nichols had sent her violets which apparently she had never received; she hinted that Marjorie might have found them—but the only violets which she, Marjorie had received had come from Janet's brother, Duncan, the afternoon of the British Embassy dinner. Touched by the attention, and stirred by a deeper emotion than she had ever felt before, she had carefully preserved

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Duncan's withered bouquet in her closet. Astounded by the discovery of the emerald and diamond bracelet in her flower box; utterly unable to explain how it got there, she had, in her desire to protect Janet and silence any investigation which the loss of the bracelet might start, returned it anonymously to Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper. In the light of Janet's note, had she inadvertently, not looking at the contents of Small's box, put away in her closet Janet's violets, and the maid, finding only Duncan's withered bouquet in the dressing-room, thrown it away? It seemed the only explanation. But Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper's remarks in the lift at the ball indicated that he was aware the bracelet had come from her, Marjorie, and that *Tom knew of its loss*. Could it be that Tom had discovered that Janet was a kleptomaniac?

The mere idea brought Marjorie up all standing; only to sink back again with a groan, appalled at the possibility. Honest Tom, with his high standards of rectitude, in love with a girl whose perception of the laws governing *meum* and *tuum* was so blunted, spelled tragedy. Marjorie dismissed the thought with a shudder, and her mind reverted to another puzzling phase of the situation: Calhoun-Cooper, by speech, and Tom, by look, had implied she was responsible for the loss and return of the bracelet. Who had . . . ?

"For once I've caught you napping!" teased a voice, and Marjorie jerked herself erect, to find Chichester Barnard standing looking down at her.

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The laughter in his eyes gave way to concern at sight of her face. "My darling, what is it?" he questioned, alarmed.

"Nothing"—then seeing his disbelief, she added, "Nothing that would interest you. . . ."

"But everything that concerns you, interests me," he protested. "What is troubling you?"

"A matter of no moment," speaking more briskly. "What brought you here this morning?"

"To be quite frank I called to see Janet Fordyce," he replied brusquely, nettled by her manner.

"I prefer you when you are candid. . . ."

"Are you trying to pick a quarrel with me?"

"Is that so difficult a thing to do?" insolently.

"If you mean I swallow every——" Barnard stopped, controlling his aroused anger with difficulty. "Come, come," he said more mildly. "It is a waste of time for us to bandy words." He held out his hands with the charming smile which had won many a friend for him. "Let's kiss and—forget."

Marjorie made no move to take his extended hand. "Who let you in?" she asked.

"The footman." Barnard paced rapidly up and down before the chimney-piece, then seated himself by Marjorie's side. "Don't treat me as an outsider," he pleaded. "I have always your best interests at heart; let me share your worries as well as your pleasures. I'll do anything in the world for you, Madge, anything"—and his voice shook with the strength of his passion.

Marjorie hesitated; her distrust controlling her

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impulse to confide her perplexities to the man who, only six short weeks before, had absorbed her mind and, as she thought, her heart.

"You are very kind," she began formally. The conventional words somewhat chilled Barnard's ardor, but his offended expression went unnoticed as Marjorie again hesitated. "What did Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper say to you about the loss of her necklace?" she asked finally.

Barnard smiled wryly. "It would be easier to tell you what she left unsaid—she only exhausted her vocabulary as we reached her house, and even then Pauline had to caution her to be quiet before the servants."

"An impossible woman!"

"With a still more impossible family," impatiently. "Did you notice Joe's manner to his mother when she called him into her box at the ball last night?"

"No; but did you see who was with him?"

"Did I," with eloquent emphasis. "Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper apparently took stock of Kathryn Allen, to her disadvantage. She was not asked to enter their box."

"The Calhoun-Coopers have social aspirations, don't forget that. . . ."

"They won't let us forget it," shrugging his shoulders, "but I rather like Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper."

"I did, until last night"—the bitterness in her voice caught Barnard's attention, but before he could

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question her, she rose and stepping over to the desk, picked up Janet's unfinished letter to Tom Nichols and deliberately tore it into tiny pieces. "If you will excuse me, I'll find out what is keeping Janet," and gathering up Mrs. Fordyce's letters and engagement book she made for the door, where she paused. "Have you any idea what steps Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper intends taking to recover her pearl necklace?"

"Telegraphed for Pinkerton's men I believe; Madge, don't go . . ." but she glided from the room before he could stop her, and with a muttered exclamation he reseated himself. A few minutes later the footman appeared in the doorway.

"Miss Langdon wishes me to tell you, sir, that Miss Janet is out motoring with her brother," he announced.

Barnard, who had started up at the servant's entrance, coolly resumed his seat. "I will wait until Miss Janet returns," he said.

"Very good, sir," and Henderson retired.

Barnard was about at the end of his patience when Janet entered the room.

"I am sorry to be late," she apologized hurriedly. "Duncan's new motor-car just came this morning, and he asked me to go for a run in it. I expected to be back before you got here," tossing off her furs and coat as she spoke.

"Let me help you," and with quick, deft fingers Barnard assisted her to remove her heavy veil. "What a becoming hat!"

FALSE WITNESS

"Do you think so?" dimpling with pleasure. "Marjorie selected it; she has awfully good taste. Has she been here?" in some anxiety.

"I came to see you, lady bird, and not to talk about another girl," Barnard glanced hastily about the room. "Come over and sit in that bow window, and nobody will disturb us."

"Very well," and crossing the room, Janet settled herself in an armchair. She was sick of fighting against the inevitable, and such Chichester Barnard now appeared to her. Try as she did, she could not avoid him. His omnipresence tormented her. She had gone out with Duncan purposely, hoping to miss his visit. On learning that he was awaiting her return, she had sent in hot haste for Marjorie only to be told that her chaperon had stepped out on an errand for her mother. She had stood outside the drawing-room portières for fully three minutes before finding courage to enter. If only Barnard would not make love to her!

"Aren't you a wee bit sleepy after last night!" she asked as he joined her in the bow window.

"The prospect of seeing you this morning has kept me wide awake," tenderly. "You treated me shamefully at the ball, giving so many dances to other men."

"You deserted me at supper," in quick defence. "We only stayed a little longer after that; Marjorie developed one of her headaches—my goodness"—catching sight of a limousine turning into the driveway leading to their porte-cochère. "Who's calling here at this hour?"

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"I believe it's the Calhoun-Coopers," Barnard peered cautiously out of the window. "It looks like their car. The theft of their pearls has murdered sleep." He stepped back and scanned Janet mockingly. "Will you face the music?"

She put out her hand as if to ward off a blow, and rising hurriedly, darted out into the hall and stopped the footman on his way to the front door.

"Not at home, Henderson," she directed. "And Mrs. Fordyce is not feeling well enough to see anyone."

"Very good, Miss Janet."

Janet turned with lagging footsteps back to the drawing-room, one hand pressed to her side to still the pounding of her heart. Barnard, a look of deep concern on his handsome face, met her at the threshold.

"My precious darling!" he murmured, but with trembling hands she pushed him violently from her as he attempted to kiss her.

"No, no!" she implored, and staggered over to the grand piano.

"How long must I serve!" demanded Barnard, his voice shaking with emotion as he followed her. "Janet, will you never listen to the dictates of your heart?"

"If I did——!" Janet's agonized gaze left his face and traveled downward to the keyboard of the piano. Suppose she told him too much? She must keep a guard upon her tongue—

"Play for me, Chichester," she pleaded.

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Barnard, no mean musician, struck several chords and stopped. "I am afraid the piano wants tuning."

"Oh, the man must have left without finishing his work," she exclaimed.

"Probably went to get his lunch; here are his tuning-fork and kit." Barnard picked up the instruments. "Only two or three notes are below pitch, perhaps I can put them right."

"Do try," she begged, and Barnard obediently struck the tuning-fork.

Janet's belief that her "not at home" message would send Mrs. J. Calhoun-Cooper away, was not well founded. Henderson's information caused that determined matron to hesitate for a second only, then she inquired for Mr. Calderon Fordyce.

"Ask him if he will see me for a few moments on a matter of importance," she added, detecting the footman's embarrassment.

"Wouldn't Miss Langdon do?" he ventured.

"Certainly not," and somewhat overawed by her air of authority, he showed her and Pauline into the reception-room and went to tell his master of their presence.

"Asked for me personally, Henderson?" questioned Calderon Fordyce, examining the visiting-cards attentively.

"Yes, sir; Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper declared Miss Langdon would not do; that she had to see you on a matter of importance, sir."

"Has Mr. Duncan returned?"

"No, sir."

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Fordyce cast a regretful look at the letter he was engaged in writing when interrupted, and rose. "Did you show the ladies into the drawing-room?"

"No, sir; they're in the reception-room," Henderson followed his master out into the hall. "If you please, sir," he began deferentially. "Don't take the ladies into the drawing-room, sir; Miss Janet is there with a caller, and I don't think she wishes to be disturbed, sir."

"Very well," and hastening his footsteps, Fordyce went directly to the reception-room. Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper returned his greeting with such impressiveness that his eyes twinkled. "Please pardon me for keeping you waiting," he began, after shaking hands with Pauline.

"We had not meant to disturb you," chimed in Pauline, "but your footman said Mrs. Fordyce was indisposed."

"And our errand is really very important," interrupted Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper, "otherwise we would not have insisted on seeing you."

Calderon Fordyce looked at his guests in some perplexity, but their serious manner impressed him, and he said slowly, "In that case we had better adjourn to my library; we can have no privacy in this room. Will you come this way?"

It was the first time Mrs. J. Calhoun-Cooper had been in the library, and she surveyed the handsomely furnished room with some envy. Calderon Fordyce's "Now, madame," brought her back to her errand.

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"Possibly Janet told you of the disappearance of my pearl necklace at the ball last night?"

"My son spoke to me about it. Have you taken any steps to recover the necklace?"

"My husband has placed the matter in the hands of detectives," Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper cleared her throat. "The necklace is really very valuable, the pearls being graduated in size and of wonderful luster. It took my husband years to collect them ——" her voice gave out.

"I am deeply sorry for your loss," said Fordyce gravely. "Have you no clue by which the thief might be traced?"

"We have," answered Pauline quickly. "And that brings us here."

"I don't take your meaning," Calderon Fordyce's heavy eyebrows met in an unmistakable frown.

"We are convinced that mother's necklace was stolen by Miss Marjorie Langdon."

Fordyce's eyes opened wide. "Preposterous nonsense!" he jerked out with more force than elegance.

"I am sorry to contradict you," Pauline's thin lips closed obstinately. "There is no doubt but that she is guilty."

"You are really in earnest?"

"Absolutely. We came here this morning to warn your wife, Mr. Fordyce, and not being able to see her, decided that it was our duty to tell you of Miss Langdon's dishonesty."

"Thank you," dryly. Fordyce regarded his visitors in incredulous silence for some seconds, then

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excusing himself, stepped past them into the hall. Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper exchanged an uneasy glance with her daughter, but had not opportunity to voice her thoughts, for Calderon Fordyce re-entered the room almost immediately, followed by Marjorie, whom he met returning from her shopping expedition.

"As your statements were not made in confidence, Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper," he said, "I must ask you to repeat them before Miss Langdon."

Marjorie, having received no inkling as to why her presence was desired in the library, gazed from one to the other in bewilderment and growing dread.

Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper flushed and her eyes flashed angrily. "I shall have no hesitancy in repeating my charges"—Marjorie's start was not lost on the others. "Miss Langdon, I demand that you instantly return my pearl necklace which you stole from me last night at the ball."

"You're mad!" burst out Marjorie. "I haven't your necklace."

"Lies won't do, my girl!" Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's native coarseness was gaining the upper hand under the pressure of excitement and rage which almost mastered her. "I felt you fumbling with the clasp of the necklace."

"Indeed? And why didn't you speak of it at the time?"

"Because my attention was distracted, and when I turned back to speak to you, you had vanished."

"With the necklace," added Pauline.

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"Not so fast!" Marjorie's indignation almost choked her utterance, and she stopped to regain control of her voice. "The robbery took place while I was still at the supper-table, ten stories beneath the ballroom."

"The necklace disappeared earlier in the evening," explained Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper, "for I missed it on my return to the ballroom immediately after supper."

"You have only your word to support such a statement," retorted Marjorie swiftly. "I deny your charge absolutely. Oh, Mr. Fordyce," turning appealingly to him, "do have faith in my word."

"Of course I will," his hearty assurance brought tears of relief to Marjorie's eyes. "Miss Marjorie, during the evening, did you see anyone enter Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's box who might be the real thief?"

Marjorie's eyes never wavered before her questioner's gaze. "I am afraid I can give you no information or clue which will help in tracing the robber," she said slowly.

"Too bad," Fordyce shook his head. "I think, Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper, you had better wait and see what the detectives can do to trace your necklace."

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Fordyce, that you do not believe me when I state that Miss Langdon stole my necklace?"

"I do, madame; unless you can get someone to substantiate your statement."

"Ask her, she knows," burst out Pauline, pointing

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to a shadowy figure standing near the half-open door. With one accord they turned in that direction, and faced by the four pairs of eyes, Janet came reluctantly forward.

Marjorie turned sick as her thoughts raced to the delicate, kindly mother upstairs and the upright, idolizing father—how would they bear the disclosure of Janet's kleptomania? The moment she dreaded had come at last.

"Well, Janet," her father's curt voice cut the silence. "What do you know of the disappearance of Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's pearl necklace?"

Janet's eyes rested for a moment on Marjorie, then traveled back to her father.

"I saw Marjorie steal the necklace," she said quietly.

Marjorie's low cry of horror was drowned in Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's triumphant shout.

"There, what did I tell you?" she demanded.

"Be quiet!" Calderon Fordyce's face had grown very grave. "Janet, are you telling the absolute truth?" Never had he spoken in that tone before to her, and Janet whitened.

"Yes, father."

"How did Miss Marjorie steal the necklace?" The question cost him an effort.

"Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper requested her to replace her scarf about her shoulders," Janet spoke more and more slowly and with growing reluctance. "When Marjorie lowered her hand, I saw the end of the pearl necklace hanging from it."

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"And you said nothing?"

"No, father."

"Why?"

"I wasn't absolutely certain—I've kept quiet since, because I could not bear to betray Marjorie."

Calderon Fordyce broke the tense silence.

"Miss Marjorie, can you deny my daughter's statement?"

Marjorie was ghastly as she straightened up and faced her accusers; Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper and Pauline openly triumphant, Calderon Fordyce, stern, unbending; and Janet, pitying. Janet's features were strangely like and unlike Duncan's, and the elusive likeness haunted Marjorie.

Twice she strove to speak.

"Oh, what's the use?" she cried, and laughing hysterically, fled from the room.

CHAPTER XX

WATCHFUL WAITING

CAN I see Dr. Potter?" inquired Duncan, handing his visiting-card to Mrs. Walbridge's butler.

"Mr. Fordyce, sir?" interrogatively, and Duncan nodded assent. "The Doctor is waiting for you, sir. Please step this way"—but before they reached the drawing-room, Paul Potter appeared in the hall.

"Very glad to see you, Duncan," he said warmly. "Nobody's home but myself, so come into the Judge's den; we can talk undisturbed there."

"I was detained in reaching here. I wanted particularly to see you alone. I had to drop Janet at home first; she went out with me to try my new roadster," explained Duncan, following Potter into the cozy room which Judge Walbridge used as his sanctum sanctorum. "Mother wishes to know if you will dine informally with us tonight; only a few friends are coming in."

"I shall be delighted to. It happens that Judge and Mrs. Walbridge are dining out, an engagement they made before I came, so I shall not upset any of their plans," replied Potter. "Come over here to

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the light and let me get a good look at you," indicating a seat by the window. "Um, a clear bill of health"—inspecting him carefully.

"Only older than when you saw me last," smiled Duncan, "and wiser."

"Perhaps," dryly, noting the unusual lines about Duncan's eyes and mouth. "And does wisdom bring happiness?"

"Don't know," with unusual abruptness. "It's good to see you again, Paul; where have you been since I left you in South America?"

"Knocking about the world. The wanderlust is ruining me, Duncan; I cannot make up my mind to seriously sit down in San Francisco and resume my practice."

"As you are called in consultation by other physicians in every State of the Union, I'm not worrying about your financial condition," retorted Duncan, examining the famous alienist carefully in his turn. "I'm much more concerned over your health—how are you these days?"

"Splendid, never felt better." Six years before Paul Potter had suffered a severe nervous breakdown from overwork, and he had accompanied Duncan on a trip to China, where the latter went to attend to some business for his father, who was one of the largest importers from that country. Potter was some fifteen years Duncan's senior, but they were congenial in their tastes, and after a year's sojourn in China had, on their return, traveled together in other countries. "Are you still as confirmed a bache-

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lor as ever, Duncan? Or is there a 'not impossible she' in the background?"

"Still a bachelor," admitted Duncan. "I am doubly glad to have you in Washington now on my mother's account."

"I was just going to ask for her," and Potter's manner became serious. "How is she?"

"In many respects much better, but she is far from strong."

"I am sorry indeed to hear that," in quick sympathy. "Is she still troubled with mysophobia?"

"To a limited degree." Duncan accepted the cigar offered him, and settled back in his chair. "Mother no longer insists on washing her own knives and forks, and takes her meals with us if no company is present; but she still has her dread of soiled money."

"That also may wear off in time," said the physician reflectively. "Is her general health good?"

"Except for valvular weakness of the heart. Poor little mother!" Duncan paused and cleared his throat. "Curious she should have developed such a morbid fear of contact with dirt."

"You must remember the human mind is a wonderful piece of mechanism, so delicately adjusted that the slightest jar throws it out of gear. That frightful railroad accident, in which your mother was half killed, was chiefly responsible for her mental condition afterwards. I am delighted to hear that she is improving."

"Mother insists on leading the life of a hermit,

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hardly sees anyone outside the family. Do you think it is good for her to be so much alone?"

"It is not good for anyone to shun their fellow-men," responded Potter decidedly. "Keep your mother interested in present-day matters. I should think your pretty sister could manage that."

"Mother turned Janet over to an official chaperon."

"Hard on your sister," commented Potter sympathetically. "And not wise for your mother; having shifted her responsibilities, she'll feel at liberty to indulge her morbid tendencies."

"Exactly." Duncan puffed nervously at his cigar. "Mother did not pick out the usual type of chaperon for Janet, so your sympathies for my sister are wasted."

"Good. Janet has changed very little; as I remember she was a pretty schoolgirl, now she is an exquisitely pretty débutante."

"She has inherited her good looks from mother. What do you think of Miss Langdon? She was with me when I met you last night," he added, to complete the identification.

"A beautiful girl; I'm not surprised you walked over the rest of us mortals when dancing with her."

Duncan fidgeted in his chair. "I'm hard hit in that quarter," he admitted slowly.

"She's lucky," commented Potter tersely. "Are congratulations in order?" He regretted the question as he saw Duncan wince.

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"Unfortunately for me, no." Duncan had turned a shade paler under the strain of the emotion he was striving to suppress. "I would never have mentioned this topic had it not been for extraordinary circumstances"—he stopped and looked carefully about the room. Seeing the hall door was closed, and there was apparently no danger of being overheard, he continued, "Will you please treat what I am about to say as confidential?"

"Of course, my dear fellow," deeply interested, Potter laid down his cigar and moved his chair nearer.

"Miss Langdon has been with Janet as, you might say, resident chaperon. . . ."

"Isn't she very young for such a responsible position?"

"Mother did not think so. Miss Langdon is really more of a companion for Janet; knows the right people to introduce to her——"

"I see, a 'guide, philosopher, and friend,' idea. . . ."

"Yes," slowly. "Miss Langdon has been with Janet since the first week in November. During that time she has conducted herself as a woman of refinement and good breeding would; she has done everything possible to see that Janet has a good time. Mother swears by her—says she cannot get on without her," he paused, considering his words with care. "My intercourse with Miss Langdon has been of the most conventional character; in her eyes I am simply Janet's elder brother. . . ."

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"Well, where is the fly in the ointment?" inquired Potter. "Other suitors?"

"As many as she wants," quietly. "It is not they who are troubling me."

"No?" in a tone of some unbelief. "Well, what then?"

Duncan spoke with an apparent effort. "Some extraordinary robberies have taken place recently . . ." A low whistle escaped Potter.

"In your house and since Miss Langdon's arrival?" he asked.

"Yes; and—and—in another house before she came to us. . . ."

"I see—the trail of the serpent. . . ."

"Don't make comments until I have finished," retorted Duncan, ruffled by Potter's manner.

"I beg your pardon," good-naturedly. "Go ahead."

But it was some moments before Duncan complied with the request.

"I have come to you with my problem," he began finally, "because I have an idea it may be in your province."

"Ah. Under what heading?"

"Kleptomania."

Potter elevated his eyebrows. "It is a recognized mental derangement," he conceded.

"Curable?"

"Doubtful." Potter forebore to look at Duncan; instinctively he knew the hope his friend was pinning on him and his advice. "Has Miss Langdon ever had scarlet fever?"

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"I don't know. Why?"

"A severe attack sometimes leaves the brain in a weakened condition and a convalescent patient might become afflicted with an uncontrollable propensity to pilfer shining objects. If such an impulse is not checked at the outset by medical treatment it may gradually develop in a monomania for thieving," answered Potter. "Do you believe Miss Langdon is a kleptomaniac?"

"I do—it is the only grounds on which I can explain her conduct."

"Suppose you give me some of the details of the robberies for which you think Miss Langdon is responsible," suggested the physician.

Quickly and tersely Duncan described the loss of his father's forty dollars, which had first aroused his suspicions of Marjorie's honesty; then related all that Admiral Lawrence had confided to him about the stolen codicil. "And to cap the climax," he concluded, "comes the theft of Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's pearl necklace at the ball last night."

After he ceased speaking, Potter, who had listened to his account with absorbed attention, rose and slowly paced the room in deep thought.

"Have you any direct proof that Miss Langdon is implicated in the loss of the necklace?" he asked, resuming his seat.

"No, none; only an intolerable fear——" Duncan's voice shook.

"I understand." Potter tugged at the lobe of his

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right ear until it crimsoned. "Is Miss Langdon poor?"

"Naturally," dryly. "Otherwise she would hardly be earning her own living."

"Very poor," insistently.

"I don't know about that," answered Duncan doubtfully. "She dresses extremely well . . ."

"That signifies nothing; the clothes may have been given her by wealthy friends. Has Miss Langdon any relatives dependent upon her?"

"Yes, a great-aunt; a lovely old Quakeress. Why do you ask?"

"A woman will steal for another when she would not steal for herself. . . ."

"Sentiment would not influence a kleptomaniac."

"The mantel of kleptomania, like charity, covers a multitude of sins," retorted Potter. "Let me explain," he added, as Duncan's color rose. "Kleptomaniacs are usually found among the wealthy class; their pleasure is derived from the *act* of stealing, not in the thing stolen. For instance, a man, possessing a handsome gold watch-chain, will steal a dozen chains, but once the desire to steal is gratified, he never cares to sell or wear the stolen chains; he may even return them to their rightful owners. Now, back of every robbery you cite against Miss Langdon, lies personal gain—the acquisition of forty dollars . . ."

"A small sum for which to ruin oneself," protested Duncan, fighting stubbornly against his own doubts as well as Potter's arguments.

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"The size of the sum is only relative, according to the need for the money. In your eyes forty dollars seems trivial; but perhaps Miss Langdon may have considered the money worth the risk she took."

"She could have gone to mother," burst in Duncan.

"Miss Langdon may have feared a refusal. Suppose we take up the lost codicil . . ."

"Marjorie Langdon did not benefit by its disappearance."

"No, but a friend stands to do so—a man with whom, according to Admiral Lawrence, Miss Langdon was infatuated. The inheritance of one hundred thousand dollars would permit them to marry . . ."

"Supposing she really is in love with him?"

"Have you reason to doubt it?"

Duncan did not answer immediately. "I cannot believe Marjorie is the type of girl to commit theft, or to center her affections on a man who is not worthy of her."

"Do you know anything against him?"

"N—no; but Mrs. Lawrence found it necessary to disinherit Barnard."

"Did the Admiral give you the reason for his wife's act?"

"She said she was angry at some investments made for her by Barnard which had turned out disastrously."

"A lack of business sense is nothing against a man's moral character."

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"That's true," acknowledged Duncan. "I admit I'm prejudiced against Barnard."

"Do you see much of him?"

"Quite a good deal; he comes frequently to the house, ostensibly to see Janet, but I suspect in reality to be near Marjorie Langdon."

"You don't think he's playing off the two girls against each other?"

"He had better not," Duncan's teeth came together with a snap. "No, Janet's whole thoughts seem to be turned to Captain Nichols; she accepts Barnard's attentions, that is all."

"And how does Miss Langdon look on Barnard's attentions to Janet?"

"Her manner gives me no inkling of what she thinks."

"She must be a good actress," commented Potter. "No woman, who commits a criminal act for a lover, will stand tamely by and see that lover devote himself to another woman unless she has marvelous self-control. . . ."

"Or no real affection for the supposed lover," put in Duncan. "At dinner tonight you can study them for yourself; both Miss Langdon and Chichester Barnard will be there."

"Good." Potter rose and placed his hand affectionately on Duncan's shoulder. "I judge more by what you have left unsaid, Duncan, of how you feel about the girl. I would to heaven I could help you!"

"Thanks," Duncan's tone was a trifle husky. "I'm afraid there's nothing anyone can do for me. I must

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'dree my weird.' But," his clenched fist came down with a resounding whack on the broad ledge of his Morris-chair arm. "I firmly believe that if Marjorie did steal the codicil, the money, and the pearl necklace, she did it unknowingly, in response to a craze to steal which she could not govern."

"Perhaps you are right. It may be, Duncan, if Miss Langdon submits to a medical examination . . ."

"I'll ask mother to seat you next to Miss Langdon at dinner," Duncan stood up. "Perhaps then you can decide what is best to be done. Come over early, Paul, I want you to see mother before the other guests arrive."

"I will." Potter accompanied Duncan to the closed door and before opening it, added earnestly. "I have not meant to be unfeeling, Duncan, in my efforts to differentiate between stealing as a criminal act, and stealing as an insane impulse."

"That's all right, Paul," hastily. "I came to you for advice, and I know you will help me if you can. Please remember me to Judge and Mrs. Walbridge," and speaking on other subjects, the two friends made their way to the front door, and Duncan started homeward.

As Duncan motored slowly up Massachusetts Avenue he recognized a familiar figure coming toward him, and making a wide turning, faced his car in the direction Marjorie was going and quickly caught up with her. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she had no idea of his presence until

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he called her by name. As his voice reached her, she started so violently that her hand-bag slipped from her fingers to the pavement, but before she could stoop to pick it up he was by her side.

"Are you on your way to a luncheon?" he asked, straightening up and placing the bag in her extended hand. "Great heavens! what is the matter?" getting a full look at her tragic face. "Has anything happened to your aunt?"

"No. Oh, no," she replied hurriedly. "You startled me, coming up so quietly."

Duncan took her hand in his with an air of quiet authority. "Tell me, what is really the matter?"

Marjorie steeled herself against the tender solicitude in his voice and gesture. What use to tell him of the scene in his father's library? He also would take Janet's word against hers. He would believe her a thief. In the silent watches of the past anxious nights, she had awakened to the realization that she had come to love Duncan with an adoration which passes understanding. It was her precious secret; he must never guess it. Her past affection for Chichester Barnard had been the shadow instead of the substance. Her endurance was almost at the breaking point; she could not face the loss of Duncan's friendship, at least not then; nor see admiration change to contempt, and liking sink to loathing. With a muttered prayer for strength, she raised her eyes to Duncan's.

"If you must know the truth," she said, "I'm suffering from a toothache—not a bit romantic, is it?"

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"Perhaps not," sympathetically. "But I know from experience there's no pain like it. If you are on your way to the dentist, can't I take you there?"

"He couldn't see me until four o'clock this afternoon," lying with trembling lips. "I am going to Aunt Yvonett's to rest quietly until then."

"Let me drive you there," pointing persuasively toward his roadster. Marjorie could think of no adequate excuse; after all it would be the quickest and easiest way to reach the shelter of her aunt's house.

"If it isn't taking you out of your way——?"

"Of course it isn't," heartily. "Mind that step," and in a second more he was seated beside her, and the powerful car moved off down Massachusetts Avenue. "How do you like my new model?" patting the side of the motor. "I had an old one in San Francisco."

"The car moves very smoothly," with well simulated interest. "Is she speedy?"

"Is she? You should have seen me trying her out on the Conduit Road this morning; I brought Janet home in record time."

"Worse luck," she groaned, below her breath.

"What did you say?" But she pretended not to hear, and he continued, "I want to ask you to be very nice to a friend of mine tonight who will sit next you at dinner."

She moved restlessly. "Who is the man?"

"Dr. Paul Potter. I introduced him to you last night. Haven't you heard of him before?"

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"I believe your sister said he attended your mother when she was ill."

"He was called in consultation. I thought you might have heard of Potter, he's a famous brain specialist. We traveled together in the East; he's deeply interested in that land of mysticism and occultism. You'll find him an interesting talker."

"Probably I will." Marjorie's fingers twitched spasmodically over her hand-bag. Her frayed nerves were giving way. "Would you mind stopping at the Portland Drug Store? I think I can get some—some iodine."

"Does your tooth pain you very much?" asked Duncan, turning the car into wide Vermont Avenue and stopping before the drug store which occupied the ground floor of one end of the large triangular apartment house. "Can't I run in and get it for you?"

"No, no, sit still." Her imperative tone stopped him as he was about to arise. "The druggist can perhaps advise me what to do, I had better ask him myself—I—I shan't be long."

"I'll wait, never fear," laughed Duncan, settling back in his seat. He watched with grave solicitude the tall, graceful girl walk up the long approach through the parking and enter the drug store.

The minutes passed and Duncan finally waxed impatient. Glancing at his watch, he found he had been waiting nearly twenty minutes. A thought occurred to him; suppose Marjorie had fainted from pain and exhaustion? She had looked on the point

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of a breakdown when she left him. With a bound he was out of the car and into the drug store. One glance around the shop showed him the place was empty except for a clerk.

"Where's the young lady who came in here a short time ago to buy some iodine?" he demanded.

"Hasn't any one bought iodine," protested the clerk. "Do you mean the young lady who came in about twenty minutes ago and walked through the store and out into Fourteenth Street?" pointing to the door opposite the one Duncan was holding partly open as he gazed in consternation and bewilderment at the clerk.

CHAPTER XXI

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MADAME YVONETT, knitting industriously as she sat in the bow window of her small parlor, watched a smart victoria drive up to the curb and stop before her door. There was no one in the carriage, and thinking the coachman had made a mistake in the number of the house, she was about to ring for Minerva when that dusky maid-of-all-work appeared in the doorway, dressed in hat and coat.

"'Scuse me, madam," she said respectfully. "Hab Miss Rebekah come in?"

"Not yet," Minerva's face fell; she had received strict orders from Marjorie never to leave Madame Yvonett alone in the house. "I am expecting her to return at any moment. Does thee wish to go out?"

"Yass'm; Miss Rebekah done tole me she'd be back by three, so's I could go to George Henry's funeral at fo' o'clock."

Madame Yvonett glanced at the clock; the hands pointed to twenty minutes past three. "Don't wait any longer," she directed kindly. "I will watch for Miss Rebekah and let her in when she comes."

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Minerva wavered between desire and her sense of responsibility.

"I done locked de kitchen do', an' all de winders in de basement," she volunteered hopefully. "Miss Rebekah kain't be much longer."

"Thee must not wait," and Madame Yvonett's tone of decision removed Minerva's doubts. "I have the telephone if I require aid. On thy way out, Minerva, tell the coachman he is stopping at the wrong house."

"No, madam, he ain't," protested Minerva hastily. "George Henry b'longed ter my burial sassiety, an' dey sent a kerrage ter take me ter de funeral."

"A victoria, Minerva?" Madame Yvonett's astonishment keyed her voice to a higher pitch.

"Yass'm." Minerva's smile of satisfaction showed every tooth in her head. "De burial committee axed me what I done want, an' I tole dem I wished one ob dem 'lay backs.' I'se allus hoped ter ride in one like white folks; ye see, poverty ain't no disgrace, but it's mighty onconvenient. I'll be hyar in time ter get supper, madam." And she departed hastily, fearing Madame Yvonett might change her mind and insist on her staying until Miss Rebekah Graves returned.

Madame Yvonett chuckled softly to herself as she watched Minerva enter the victoria and drive off in state. The victoria, with its triumphant occupant, had hardly turned into K Street, before Madame Yvonett descried Miss Rebekah Graves trudging across Franklin Park, intent on taking the shortest

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cut home. The Quakeress was at the front door to meet her when she reached the steps.

"Do not trouble to go to thy room to remove thy wraps, Becky," she said. "Take them off here, and come into the parlor, it is the warmest room in the house. Thee must be cold," eyeing the pinched lips and red nose of the spinster with much sympathy.

Miss Rebekah sniffed as she inspected the narrow confines of the small hall, and compromised the matter by walking into the dining-room and leaving her hat and coat there. On entering the parlor she found Madame Yvonett had resumed her knitting, and she paused a moment to smooth back several gray locks in the severe style which she affected to dress her hair.

"Did thee find affairs satisfactory at the Home?" questioned Madame Yvonett.

"I did not," seating herself near Madame Yvonett. "Two girls whom the matron rescued, have returned to their wicked ways."

"If thee made virtue less detestable, Becky, thee would have more true converts."

"You are entirely too lax in your views," retorted Miss Rebekah, nettled by her cousin's criticism. "I warned you years ago that evil would come if you indulged Marjorie too much."

"Thee did thy best to warn me, Becky," admitted the Quakeress, taking no pains to conceal her amusement. "I give thee credit for plain speaking."

"I fear your reward will be less." Miss Rebekah's temper had been sorely tried by the long ride in the

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cold wind, and like many another she ached to vent her ill-humor on some one. "Marjorie has fallen from the path of rectitude and honor."

"Rebekah!" Madame's steel knitting needles were not as bright as the flash in her eyes as she regarded the irate spinster. "Take heed to what thee says; my patience is small this afternoon."

"I mean exactly what I say. Did Marjorie tell you she was discharged by Admiral Lawrence?"

The Quakeress laid down her needles. "No."

"Ah, I thought she would not dare."

"Explain thyself, Rebekah."

"I met Admiral Lawrence this morning; he asked me to acquaint you with the fact that he discharged Marjorie for stealing"—Madame Yvonné's hand sought her heart as if to still its sudden throb, and her face went gray—"for stealing a codicil to his wife's will in which Mrs. Lawrence disinherited Chichester Barnard," finished Miss Rebekah, her small triumph blinding her to the agony she had inflicted on her aged kinswoman. Had not Marjorie's "going wrong" fulfilled her prophecy? She had always been jealous of Madame Yvonné's affection for her greatniece, and had treasured each careless action and thoughtless word Marjorie had been guilty of to her, the better to nurse her spite against the young girl. But Admiral Lawrence, in asking her to break the news of the codicil's loss, his suspicions, and proposed legal action to Madame Yvonné, had placed a double-edged sword in her hand. Ever ready to believe evil of her fellowmen and women,

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the spinster never doubted that Madame Yvonett would instantly credit Admiral Lawrence's charge against Marjorie.

"Thee is mad; quite mad!" gasped the Quakeress, as soon as she recovered her breath. "I am surprised thee dares to come to me with such lies!"

"Lies? Do you doubt Admiral Lawrence's word?" Miss Rebekah's eyes were round with wonder.

"Of course I doubt it. Does thee think for one moment I would believe ill of my Marjorie?" Her fine voice trembled with passionate intentness. "Thee is madder than I first supposed, Rebekah." The spinster quailed before her scorn. "Answer the front door, the bell has been ringing for some moments; then thee can go to thy room and pack thy trunk."

Confused by the way her news had been received, the spinster backed hastily out of the room, tears streaming down her face. But Madame Yvonett did not weep; the wound her cousin had inflicted was too deep to be healed so easily. With tightly compressed lips and flashing eyes she sat straight in her high back chair, listening to a spirited argument that was taking place in the hall. Suddenly the portières parted and a handsome young woman, dressed in the extreme of fashion, stepped into the room, followed by the protesting spinster.

"Are you Madame Yvonett?" she inquired of the Quakeress. "I am Miss Calhoun-Cooper. I called to see your niece, Marjorie Langdon. This person"

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—indicating Miss Rebekah with a rude tilt of her head, “informs me she is not here.” The spinster’s face was a study as she glared at Pauline.

“Thee has been told the truth,” answered the Quakeress, inspecting her visitor with interest. “My niece is not here.”

“Ah, it’s as I suspected; she’s made a quick getaway!” exclaimed Pauline.

“Thy manners leave much to be desired, and thy speech more so,” replied Madame Yvonett with gentle dignity. “If thee will express thyself in correct English, I may be able to understand thee and answer thy remark.”

“Indeed?” sneered Pauline, her desire to hurt stirred by the merited rebuke. “Then, in plain English—your niece is a thief, and she has run away with my mother’s pearl necklace.”

Madame Yvonett sat immovable under the blow; not by the flicker of an eyelash did she show the agony she was enduring. Miss Rebekah, quite unaware that she had left the front door wide open, stood enthralled, watching the scene.

“Thee has made a statement which I can both understand and refute,” said Madame Yvonett slowly. “My niece would never stoop to such dishonorable actions as thee accuses her of——”

“She will have a chance to clear herself of the charge in a criminal court, *if* she can,” broke in Pauline with brutal frankness. “My mother and I are quite determined to push the matter to the end.”

“Thy determination is as nothing compared to

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mine," retorted Madame Yvonett. "Marjorie's innocence will be proved, and those who have traduced her shall suffer."

"Threats don't bother me," Pauline shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "Janet Fordyce saw Marjorie Langdon steal the necklace from mother"—Madame Yvonett swayed backward; then by a supreme effort, recovered from the deadly faintness which threatened to overcome her. "The Fordyces acknowledge her guilt, and have turned her out of their house."

"The more shame to them." The Quakeress rose abruptly to her feet, her eyes blazing with pent-up wrath. "I care not who accuses my niece—she is innocent of all wrong-doing; and so I will contend with my feeble strength and wit before the world"—in spite of every effort, she was trembling from head to foot. "My feet are already turned toward Eternity, but God will spare me to right so monstrous an injustice against an upright, honorable girl, whose only crime is poverty."

Pauline's unpleasant laugh was checked by the sudden entrance of a tall man who brushed her unceremoniously to one side.

"Madame Yvonett," said Duncan clearly. "I share your faith in Marjorie——" A low cry burst from the Quakeress, and tears, which no jeer of Pauline's had been able to call forth, rushed to her eyes. Blindly she caught Duncan's strong hand and held it close in her trembling fingers. "Marjorie was not turned out of my father's house, but

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left of her own accord," continued Duncan. "Why this young lady should maliciously distort facts"—Pauline changed color as she met his contemptuous gaze—"she alone can explain."

"You are very unjust," protested Pauline. "I was but quoting Janet; I did not realize your sister's word was—unreliable."

But the gibe passed unnoticed except by Paul Potter, who had entered a few minutes before with Duncan, and remained standing in the hall. On their arrival they had found the front door wide open, and had been unintentional listeners to Pauline's charges against Marjorie; the girl's penetrating voice having carried each word to them with absolute distinctness.

"I hoped, Madame Yvonett, that this misunderstanding in which your niece is involved, would not reach your ears," said Duncan. "I am sure if Miss Calhoun-Cooper pauses to reflect, she will say nothing further on the subject to anyone."

Pauline had indeed been thinking rapidly. It was one thing to brow-beat Madame Yvonett, quite another to antagonize so influential a family as the Fordyces. Her social ambitions might easily be nipped in the bud if Duncan pursued his quixotic course and persuaded his parents to drop the Calhoun-Coopers from their acquaintance. Quickly she decided to modify her tone.

"Of course I will not mention the matter to outsiders," she said. "But mother and I will listen to no compromise unless the pearl necklace is given back."

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"Thee must go elsewhere for thy pearls," declared Madame Yvonett undauntedly. Tom's account of the loss of his coin flashed into her mind. "Why does thee not question thy brother about the pearls?"

"What need?" but Pauline's fingers clenched in her muff as she put the contemptuous question. "Miss Fordyce's testimony is most convincing—she saw Miss Langdon steal the necklace."

"One moment," interrupted Duncan. "My mother, Miss Calhoun-Cooper, will make good your loss, if necessary; but first," his voice deepened—"I shall take steps to clear Miss Langdon of this preposterous charge, and bring the real thief to book."

Madame Yvonett's expressive look thanked him; then she faced Pauline.

"Thee came uninvited to my house; thee has shown me more discourtesy than I have ever met with before—considering the source I am hardly surprised." Pauline shrank back as she met the beautiful, scornful eyes. "Thee has dared to besmirk my niece's character; for that I will never forgive thee. Thee may go."

"Oh, very well," and tossing her head, Pauline left the room and house, banging the front door shut with a violence that shook windowpanes and pictures.

There was a moment's silence; then Madame Yvonett turned back to Duncan. "How can I ever thank thee?" she murmured brokenly.

"By letting me see Miss Langdon," taking her out-stretched hand.

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"But Marjorie is not here—I have not seen her since yesterday."

Duncan gazed incredulously at her, then a worried expression crossed his face, "Do you mean she has not been here at all today?"

"Yes."

"But she told me when I met her she was coming straight here," he protested. "She left me, for some unknown reason, at the Portland Drug Store and, I supposed, returned here."

"At what hour was that?" demanded Madame Yvonett, growing a shade paler.

"About twenty minutes past one."

"Did she have any clothes with her?"

"No, she only carried a hand-bag. Janet told me before I left the house that her things were still in her room."

"Did Marjorie seem distraught?" Madame Yvonett moistened her dry lips, a new terror tugging at her heart-strings.

"No, only nervous." The answer was reassuring, but Duncan's manner was not, and with a low moan of anguish Madame Yvonett sank unconscious to the ground.

Paul Potter sprang to Duncan's assistance, and the two men, under Miss Rebekah's frightened guidance, carried Madame Yvonett to her room. Once there the skilled physician took entire charge, and to Duncan's immense relief, the Quakeress soon revived under his treatment. Potter followed Duncan as he tiptoed out into the upper hall.

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"Don't wait around any longer," he whispered. "I'll stay here with Madame Yvonett until her regular physician arrives and the trained nurse you sent for. Do you still wish me to dine with you tonight?"

"Of course; don't fail me," in some alarm. "I must have a long talk with you. Janet refuses to call off her dinner tonight, and father backs her up. Mother's not strong enough today to be dragged into the discussion, or I would soon put an end to the affair. Look here, Paul," drawing out a well-filled wallet and thrusting a handful of bills into his friend's hand. "See that Madame Yvonett wants for nothing."

"I will," promised Potter, and disappeared inside the sick-room.

Miss Rebekah was sitting disconsolately in the lower hall as Duncan made his way to the front door.

"How is Madame Yvonett?" she asked eagerly.

"She has regained consciousness and is resting quietly"—the spinster's face lighted with relief. "You can trust absolutely to Dr. Potter," added Duncan. "He will remain until Madame Yvonett's family physician arrives."

"Thank you, thank you both," stammered Miss Rebekah incoherently. "What should I have done without you!"

"That's all right," replied Duncan soothingly. "Will you do me a very great kindness, Miss Graves?"

"Surely."

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"Then telephone me the instant Miss Langdon returns. My number is"—drawing out his visiting-card and writing the figures upon it. "You won't forget?"

"No, indeed," and Miss Rebekah sped upstairs as Duncan opened the front door.

Barely glancing at the children and nurses in the park, he strode through Franklin Square and along K Street absorbed in dismal reflections. After discovering Marjorie's disappearance from the drug store that morning, he had returned at once to his home deeply puzzled by her behavior. On his arrival his father had called him into the library and recounted the charge made against Marjorie by the Calhoun-Coopers, Janet's damning testimony, and Marjorie's flight. He had listened in stony silence, refusing to make any comment, and after luncheon had retired to his room. Harassed by conflicting theories, he finally rebelled against submitting longer to discouraging idleness, and seizing the telephone, had sent an urgent message to Paul Potter to meet him at the Metropolitan Club and go with him to Madame Yvonett's. He felt an overwhelming desire to see Marjorie, to make her face the issue squarely and refute, if she could, the damning evidence against her. Anything was better than the uncertainty he was undergoing.

Duncan stopped dead in his tracks. Should he go to the police and report Marjorie's disappearance? Pshaw! he was a fool; the girl could have come to no harm in broad daylight in peaceful Washington.

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She was probably sitting in some hotel, or walking the streets trying to make up her mind to go home and tell Madame Yvonett that she had been accused of being a thief. Surely any girl might be excused for putting off breaking such a piece of news to a delicate old lady? And yet, would it not be natural for her to rush to a near and dearly-loved relative for consolation and advice? Duncan shook his head in deep bewilderment. Flight was usually tacit admission of guilt. He was so deep in thought that he never observed an older man approaching down the street who, on seeing him, quickened his footsteps.

"Well, Duncan," and Admiral Lawrence paused in front of him. "So you received my note."

"Note?" Duncan shook his head. "No, sir, I've had no note from you."

"Oh, I thought you were on your way to see me in answer to it," replied the Admiral thoughtfully. "I have filed suit to break the will."

"You are very unwise, sir," Duncan's eyes expressed his indignation.

"That remains to be seen. Do you still propose to defend Miss Langdon?"

"I do," with quiet finality. "Who is residuary legatee?"

"I am."

"Then you benefit by the signing of that codicil?"

"Certainly; what then?"

"Chichester Barnard can easily retaliate by charging you with using undue influence in persuading

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his aunt to revoke her bequest to him." The Admiral choked with wrath. "One hundred thousand dollars—um!—men have done much to gain that sum. How do I know you haven't trumped up this codicil charge against Marjorie Langdon as a means to break the will?"

"D—mn my soul!" stormed the Admiral, getting back his breath. "D'ye think I'm a dirty black-guard? My lawyer, Alvord, who drew up the codicil on October 31, is waiting to see me; come on in and interview him now."

"Where do you live?"

"In that house on the corner." As Duncan's gaze swept over the unpretentious red-brick, stone-trimmed residence, his eyes encountered those of a darky butler who was anxiously regarding them from the open doorway. The chords of memory were touched, and a mental picture rose before Duncan's eyes. Abruptly he swung back to the Admiral.

"You say the codicil was drawn and signed on October 31; when did you first discover its loss?"

"The morning of November first . . ."

"Let us go in and see Alvord," interrupted Duncan, a strange light in his eyes. Without further words the Admiral led the way to the English basement house.

"Mr. Alvord's been awaitin' mos' an hour, suh," explained the butler, assisting them off with their overcoats. "He axed me ter watch out an' ax yo' ter hurry, 'cause he's awful busy."

"Very well, Sam; where is Mr. Alvord?"

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"In de lib'ry, suh."

"This way, Duncan," and the Admiral piloted his guest to the pleasant room where Marjorie had spent so many hours. An elderly man rose on their entrance. "Sorry to have kept you, Alvord," apologized the Admiral. "This is Mr. Duncan Fordyce. Kindly tell him in detail of the signing of the codicil to my wife's will."

Alvord glanced in some astonishment at his client; then followed his request, and Duncan listened with close attention as he described having Marjorie type-write the codicil, making two copies, and the signing of the original copy by Mrs. Lawrence.

"Admiral Lawrence requested me to leave the signed codicil here, and instructed Miss Langdon to place it in the safe," he ended. "I gave her the paper . . ."

"Could you take your solemn oath that you gave her the *signed* copy?"

"I am willing to swear that to the best of my recollection I gave her the signed codicil . . ."

"That's an equivocation," challenged Duncan promptly.

"Well, what difference does it make? Only the unsigned codicil turned up next morning. I left a codicil, signed or unsigned, on this desk—she could have stolen it a deal easier from the desk."

"Exactly where did you place the paper?" questioned Duncan.

"On this side of the desk nearest the window," Alvord indicated the spot with his hand.

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"You dare not swear that you handed Miss Langdon the signed codicil because you *fear* you gave her the unsigned one," taunted Duncan. "Wait," as the harassed lawyer started to interrupt him. "You did hand Miss Langdon the unsigned copy, however, which was found in the safe—therefore her responsibility in the matter ends."

"Hold hard," broke in the Admiral heatedly. "As Alvord says, Marjorie could have stolen the signed codicil off the desk; she was the last person to leave this room that evening, and I the first to enter in the morning—and the codicil was not on the desk."

"You were not the *first* person to enter this room that morning," contradicted Duncan. "Ask your butler to step here a moment."

The Admiral hesitated, but Duncan's earnest manner solved his doubt, and he rang for his servant.

"Come in, Sam," he directed as the butler rapped on the door.

"Sam," began Duncan slowly. "Why have you never told Admiral Lawrence that you knocked a valuable paper off his desk with your feather duster and out of the open window?"

"Fo' Gawd! boss, how'd yo' know 'bout dat?" Sam turned ashy.

"I was passing the house and saw the paper sail through the window into the gutter where the water carried it down the sewer. This was the morning of my arrival in Washington, Admiral—November first."

The Admiral stared speechlessly at Duncan, then

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wheeled on his frightened servant. "Why did you never tell me of this?"

"'Cause yo' never axed me 'bout de paper; ef yo' had I'd a telled yer," protested Sam. "When yo' didn't say nuffin' I thought de paper wasn't no 'count."

"Go downstairs, you rascal!" thundered the Admiral, and Sam, glad to escape, disappeared from the room. "Well, Alvord, what d'ye think?"

The lawyer tugged at his mustache. "What is your theory, Mr. Fordyce?" he asked, passing on the Admiral's question.

"That you gave the unsigned codicil to Miss Langdon who, following instructions, placed it in the safe where the Admiral found it the next morning. Sam knocked the signed paper into the gutter, and it went down the sewer."

"Could you make out any writing on the paper as it fell, Mr. Fordyce?"

"Unfortunately, no; the paper resembled an ordinary letter size typewriting sheet, folded three times. It spread open and fell writing down."

"The codicil was written on ordinary typewriting paper such as you describe," admitted Alvord. "It was the only kind Miss Langdon had here. Still, that's slim proof to back your theory, Mr. Fordyce."

"But it will hold," Duncan's elation could be read in his animated expression and excited manner. "I'm willing to face any court, and I'll win my case. . . ."

"And that scamp, Chichester Barnard, will win his hundred thousand after all," groaned the Admiral.

CHAPTER XXII

"TOUJOURS SANS TACHE"

ON leaving Duncan sitting in his roadster before the apartment house, Marjorie had every intention of slipping into the Portland through the drug store. Once safely inside the building she would take refuge in a friend's apartment and there fight out her problems alone. The desire to confide in Duncan, to beg his assistance was overmastering. She dared not trust herself longer in his presence. In her doubt and agony, and longing for his sympathy, she might betray her passionate love for him. A touch of his hand . . . one look from his dear eyes . . . Marjorie resolutely kept her face turned toward her goal. Duncan's affection for his sister was deep and abiding . . . he would never believe evil of Janet.

Marjorie strangled a sob as she stumbled into the drug store, and for a second she struggled gamely for composure, but the close atmosphere of the room combined with her overstrung state, upset her completely. She stepped appealingly toward the clerk to ask him for a glass of water, but he was busy with some drugs and did not observe her half-fainting condition. Swinging dizzily about, she made

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blindly for the door, her one instinct to get away from Duncan. With her last remaining strength she pulled open the heavy door and stepped outside. The cold fresh air revived her somewhat, but her confusion of mind was added to by discovering she was standing in busy Fourteenth Street instead of the quiet lobby of the apartment-hotel. She had walked out of the wrong door. Before she could retrace her footsteps, Chichester Barnard stepped to her side.

"What good fairy sent you here?" he exclaimed gaily. "I was just going back to my office." His smile was very winning, but Marjorie was too spent to attempt reply. Her silence claimed his attention, and his startled eyes swept her livid face in consternation. "Good Heavens! Marjorie, what are you doing in the street in this condition?" he turned and hailed a livery carriage from which a passenger had just alighted. "Engaged?" he inquired of the negro driver.

"No, suh."

"Jump in, Marjorie," but she hung back, striving to articulate, then the world turned black, and she hung limp upon his arm.

Some hours later Marjorie stirred, sat more erect, and rubbed her eyes and forehead vigorously. The shadows of the late afternoon were lengthening, and she had some difficulty in focusing the objects about her, and eyed her unfamiliar surroundings in complete mystification.

"Feeling better, Marjorie?" asked Barnard's voice from the depths of an easy chair across the

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room from her, and he rose and switched on the electric lamp.

"Where—where—am I?" she demanded. Not pausing for an answer she picked up a tumbler of cold water standing on a table at her elbow, and drank thirstily. Her throat felt parched and dry.

"In my rooms," replied Barnard easily. The tumbler slipped and broke on the polished floor, as Marjorie faced him.

"How dare you bring me here? Have you no regard for my reputation?" He changed color at her tone and words, but curbed his own temper admirably.

"In bringing you here I forgot everyone but the person for whom *you* show the greatest consideration—Madame Yvonett," he replied gently, and a low cry escaped her. "How could I take you to your home looking more dead than alive? The shock might have killed your aunt."

"I had not thought of that," she conceded. "I have a dim recollection of driving on and on."

"So we did. I put you in the cab intending to go at once to your home; then a glimpse of your face convinced me that while you looked frightfully ill, you were really only suffering from collapse. I told the coachman to drive up and down the back streets, forced you to drink a little whiskey which I had in my flask, and that, and the cold wind, gradually brought you around. These rooms of mine are on the ground floor, and I slipped you in here unnoticed."

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Marjorie studied him covertly as the events of the morning slowly recurred to her. Had he been in the Fordyce house when Janet testified before the Calhoun-Coopers and Mr. Fordyce that she had seen her steal the pearl necklace?

"Why did you not take me back to the Fordyces?" she asked.

"That occurred to me," admitted Barnard, "but to be quite frank I thought that your arriving there with me in the condition you were in would cause adverse criticism. The same consideration deterred me from taking you to a hospital."

"I see," slowly. "Perhaps you acted for the best, but——"

"I may not have been wise," he broke in, "but I was greatly alarmed. I at first feared that you were dead as you lay there in the carriage. At the thought my whole world crumbled to dust," his voice vibrated with emotion. "I never realized how much you were to me until I thought I had lost you . . ." he faltered and broke down, moved beyond himself by his passion. He dropped on his knee beside her —"Best beloved!"

She shrank back under his touch. "Don't, don't Chichester," she implored. "I am not strong enough for more scenes," and hysterical sobs wracked her from head to foot. Barnard stood up and watched her in growing concern until she regained some semblance of self-control. "It's a relief to cry," she stammered.

"My own sweetheart," he murmured fondly.

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"Would to heaven I could bear your sorrows for you. Won't you tell me what is troubling you?"

Marjorie paused; would Barnard take her word against Janet's? Her loyal trust in him had made her at first slow to believe he was seriously courting Janet, but once convinced of his double dealing, indignation and contempt had supplanted all warmer feeling for him. Barnard still kept up the pretense of his affection for her, but was it likely he would take her part against Janet? She rose and moved unsteadily across the room that she might get a better look at him, and study his expression.

"Sit, here, Marjorie," Barnard patted the sofa invitingly, but she declined, and he stepped to her side. "How often have I pictured you here," he said softly, glancing about the comfortable room. "Little girl, I long for you always."

"Don't Chichester," she threw out her hand beseechingly. "Drop this sham—be honest with me. . . ."

"You doubt me?" in hurt surprise. "You, my darling, for whom I would sacrifice so much to win!"

"All that is past . . ."

"It is not," he broke in vehemently. "I have learned my lesson this afternoon; I shall never give you up, never." He spoke as if making an unalterable vow with himself, and she watched him uneasily. "Give me a little encouragement, take back your harsh words," he whispered and with a movement so swift that she could not avoid it, he slipped his arm about her waist. Swayed by his physical charm,

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she permitted him to draw her closer, but before his lips touched hers, Duncan's face leaped out of the shadows of memory, and she pushed Barnard from her.

"Stop!" In her endeavor to render her voice steady, she made it hard. "I am in no mood for love scenes, Chichester."

A gleam of fury lighted Barnard's eyes as he seized her arm.

"Has Duncan Fordyce come between us?" he demanded. "Answer!"

"Have you lost your senses?" Her cold fury matched his blazing wrath. "I took you for a gentleman; no gentleman browbeats a woman!"

"Will you answer my question?" paying no attention to her gibe.

"What if I say yes?" Marjorie had seldom looked so beautiful; cheeks pink and eyes bright with feverish excitement. Tall and slim and graceful, she faced the jealous man with undaunted spirit.

"If I thought you meant it——?" Barnard's husky whisper barely reached her ears, but his look of agony smote her, angry as she was.

"Are you the only one who can—flirt?" she asked, half drawn by his personal magnetism, and half repelled by his manner.

"Is that all?" eagerly. "Are you merely trying to tease me? Oh, it *must* be that"—answering his own impetuous question in his anxiety to trample down his doubts. "A girl must love a man when she steals for him."

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Marjorie stood frozen; every vestige of color stricken from her face. "Explain your meaning." The words were little more than a whisper.

"You destroyed the signed codicil in which Aunt Margaret Lawrence revoked her bequest to me. . ."

"Chichester!" Her voice was poignant with outraged feeling. "You dare to think me a thief!"

"No, no, my darling, only a loyal woman—a woman who has the courage of her affections—how I love you, Marjorie!" His voice lingered on her name.

"How you insult me, you mean!" With a violent wrench Marjorie tore herself free from his grasp, and turning, gathered up her belongings. "Let me pass," as he planted himself in front of her.

"Where to?"

"That is no longer your business."

"Suppose I won't let you go?"

Marjorie flinched; it was a new Barnard confronting her. Gone was the suave courtly lover, and in his place stood the primeval man, his baser passions roused. And she had once believed she cared for him. The thought stung.

"Drop this melodrama, Chichester," she said cuttingly. "Your conduct has effectually killed whatever affection or respect I had for you."

"You are wrong; I have been too patient with your whims and fancies. Hereafter I take what I want." Barnard laughed recklessly. "Women do not usually refuse me; they like masters."

"Do not class me with your associates," she an-

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answered with scornful emphasis. "If you come any nearer me, Chichester, I shall scream for help."

"And your reputation will be ruined if you are found here with me," mockingly. "Think it over." She remained silent. "Is it worth the risk?"

"Risk? I am not hesitating on that score," proudly.

"I forgot your family motto, '*Toujours sans tache*,'" he taunted.

"And no bar sinister," she said, glancing significantly at the coat-of-arms hanging above the mantel. Barnard winced, she had touched the vulnerable point in his family history; a history of which he was inordinately proud except for that single blemish. He threw out his hands imploringly.

"Think, my darling, before it is too late; can you afford to break with me?"

"I fail to understand you," she retorted hotly. "Our so-called engagement was at an end days ago; I have repeatedly returned your ring"

"I decline to accept your refusal," with forced calmness, and his expression altered. "Marjorie, I have been mad! Forget all that I have said; remember only that I love you and you alone. Take back my ring, my darling."

"No, never!" she shrank away as he offered it to her. "I *will* go!"

Barnard stepped instantly aside. "I implore your forgiveness," he pleaded desperately. "I deserve all the harsh things you said of me, dear; but you have never truly loved"—Marjorie's face changed,

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ever so slightly, and she avoided his gaze—"you have never loved," he repeated stubbornly, "never known what it is to be tempted. Give me a chance to win back your good opinion; it is all that I ask—now."

"It is useless;" Marjorie walked over to the door leading to the outer hall, and from that safe haven, turned and faced him. "I never wish to see you again," she announced with passionate fervor, and opening the door, dashed into the hall.

Barnard started to follow her, then thinking better of it, returned to his seat on the sofa and gazed blankly about the room. It seemed strangely empty without Marjorie, and cursing his lack of self-control and temper which had frightened her away, he picked up a letter lying on the table which had escaped his earlier notice. It proved to be a curt note from Alvord and Alvord informing him that Rear Admiral Lawrence had brought suit to break his wife's will. For a long time Barnard sat inarticulate with rage; two stumbling blocks were in his way to winning Marjorie for his wife; one, of his own making, and the other, a law contest. With settled determination to win both he picked up the evening paper and began to read it.

Once in the street Marjorie set out in the direction of Washington but she was so unutterably exhausted by all that she had gone through, that her footsteps lagged and her progress was slow. She was not very familiar with Georgetown, but had a general idea of the direction she should take, and keeping an

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outlook for a passing cab, she staggered rather than walked along, her heart filled with bitter and hopeless anguish. She had kept the faith and had been loyal to her benefactress, but when the guilt of others had been fastened upon her shoulders not one friend had believed in her innocence. She had still to face Madame Yvonett. She shivered involuntarily, paused, walked on, paused again, then turned and staggered off in the direction of the Potomac River.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HEARING EAR

JANET, coming swiftly along the hall toward her mother's bedroom, met a white-capped nurse advancing toward her.

"How is mother?" she demanded.

"Resting more easily now, Miss Fordyce; the medicine gave her almost immediate relief."

"Thank heaven!" Janet moved forward a few steps intending to enter her mother's bedroom, but the nurse detained her.

"I beg your pardon; your brother and Dr. Potter are with Mrs. Fordyce just now. Seeing so many together might overexcite her. Could you not come in a little later?"

"I suppose so," but Janet looked troubled. "You are sure she is better, nurse?"

"Yes, indeed," with a reassuring smile.

"Then please ask my brother and Dr. Potter to stop in the Chinese room when they leave mother. I would like to talk to them privately before our guests arrive for dinner."

"I will tell them," promised the nurse, and turned to go.

"Just a moment," Janet gazed perplexedly at the

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pretty woman standing just under the hall light. "Haven't I seen you before?"

"I don't think so, Miss Fordyce," Kathryn Allen's smile was most engaging. "I am sure I should not have forgotten." And the subtle admiration of Janet's good looks and pretty gown conveyed by her intonation, caused the young girl to flush warmly. "Do not distress yourself on your mother's account; Dr. Potter and Dr. McLane both declare her attack comes from overexertion. Rest and absolute quiet are all that she needs to effect a complete recovery."

"Oh, thank you, nurse," and Janet, much relieved, ran down the staircase.

A disagreeable smile spoiled Kathryn Allen's good looks as she watched Janet disappear from view; then with an impatient sigh, she continued her interrupted trip down the hall toward the bedroom which had been assigned to her. As she reached the elevator shaft the door opened and a man stepped out into the hall.

"You, Joe!" Though startled out of her usual calm, Kathryn was careful to keep her voice lowered. "What are you doing here? How dare you take such a risk?"

"The risk is small," he answered cautiously. "I pushed the wrong button and never discovered my mistake until the lift stopped at this floor," a satisfied smile completed the short explanation. "I had to see you, Kathryn. Why did you come here?"

"I gave up my other case yesterday, as you know,"

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tartly. "I can't afford to be idle. At the hospital I found Dr. McLane's call for a nurse to take a light case, and came here. Money is money, dear boy." She did not think it necessary to add that she had considered the opportunity of becoming an inmate of the Fordyce household a God-given chance.

"You should have consulted me first," fumed Joe, displeased at the lightness of her manner. "I only found out by chance from McLane that you were here. Have you seen the evening paper?"

The urgency of his tone impressed her. From above came the sound of advancing footsteps.

"Quick, this way," she muttered, and pulled him into the deep shadows afforded by a bow window and its curtains.

Downstairs in the Chinese room Janet waited for her brother and Paul Potter with ever growing impatience. The thick soft carpet deadened the sound of her restless trampling back and forth. She could not keep still. She fingered the rich oriental hangings, scanned the valuable jade and carved ivory ornaments in the glass cabinets; then turned her attention to the collection of Chinese armor occupying its allotted space, and traced with curious fingers the beautiful handiwork on the scabbards and daggers and carefully inspected the naked blades themselves. The atmosphere of the room was heavy with the incense of the East. Mrs. Fordyce had selected the room as her own private sanctum in preference to the larger library, and spent all her evenings there in the absence of Janet and Duncan.

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Her fondness for things oriental had been indulged by her husband, who had spent a small fortune collecting costly furniture, curios, paintings, and silks from China to gratify her whim.

Tired of contemplating the armor Janet stepped over to the inlaid teakwood desk, and seating herself before it, idly opened one of the numerous magazines which her mother had left there. Suddenly her attention was arrested by a photograph of Tom Nichols, and she turned eagerly to the printed page, to find that the article was descriptive of Fort Myer and other army posts. She took a second look at Tom's picture. It was a good likeness. Janet's eyes grew very tender, and impulsively she stooped and kissed the picture. She jerked herself erect as the hall door opened, and a hot blush dyed her cheeks, but the question on her lips remained unspoken. Marjorie Langdon was confronting her.

Shutting the door softly behind her, Marjorie advanced into the room and quietly seated herself opposite Janet. The contrast between the two girls was noticeable in the extreme. Janet made a dainty picture of fresh young beauty in her perfectly fitting, expensive low-neck evening dress, while Marjorie, her white crêpe de chine waist and walking skirt covered by a heavy driving coat and minus her hat, looked spent and weary. She had aged in the last few tortured hours, and the hands she rested on the flat-top desk were trembling from fatigue and nervousness.

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"You?" Janet's agitation was perceptible in her voice and manner. "What—what do you want? What are you doing here?"

"I came, Janet, hoping that you had thought better of your extraordinary behavior to me this morning," answered Marjorie looking quietly at her, but Janet did not flinch before her direct gaze.

"Don't make things harder for me, Marjorie," she said sadly. "I was—we all were—very fond of you; why did you abuse our trust? Mother would gladly have helped you out of any pressing money difficulties."

Marjorie's incredulous stare deepened suddenly into horror.

"Janet! Janet!" she gasped. "Does your moral obliquity blind you to all sense of honor?"

Janet stiffened and her manner hardened. "You forget yourself."

Marjorie's hardly tried self-control snapped, and leaning back in her chair she gave way to wild laughter which ended in sobs. Janet regarded her in increasing alarm.

"Go! Go at once!" she ordered.

The sharp command restored Marjorie to some semblance of composure. "No, I shall not go," she said more quietly. "You are right, Janet, I have forgotten myself—to an absurd extent; but I'll do so no longer. Your father shall learn the truth to-night."

"He will turn you out of the house as a common adventuress."

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Marjorie leaned across the desk and contemplated Janet in silence.

"Janet," she began at length. "I have never shown you anything but kindness; I have tried in every way to see that you had a good time and were enjoying yourself. In Heaven's name, what has aroused your animosity? Why should you hound me in this manner?"

"I'm not hounding you," protested Janet, tears springing to her eyes. "I have tried very hard to blind myself to your—your——"

"My what?" a dangerous light in her eyes.

But Janet dodged the question. "You must go," she said, her words tumbling over each other in her haste. "My guests will arrive here in a few minutes. Pauline must not find you here—there will be another scene——" Janet fairly wrung her hands—"People will talk so."

"Quite right, they will," but the significant emphasis passed completely over Janet's head. "I have no objection to confronting Pauline again, and particularly do I wish to see Tom Nichols."

"Ah, indeed; and what do you wish to see him about?"

"I desire his advice," calmly. "I started to go to Fort Myer this afternoon and got as far as the Aqueduct Bridge in Georgetown when I recollected he was to dine here——"

"And so decided to come here yourself," Janet laughed recklessly. "Your motives are not so pure as you would lead me to suppose."

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"Stop!" Marjorie's imperious tone made even the jealous girl pause. "I think you have taken leave of your senses."

"You are welcome to your opinion," retorted Janet defiantly. "But I insist on your leaving this house. Do you wish to be turned out again?"

"I have never been turned out." Marjorie was struggling to keep her temper within bounds. "I left this house of my own accord this morning. My clothes are still here, and here I shall remain until I am dismissed by your mother."

Janet's eyes were dark with passion. "You dare to stay on as my chaperon?"

"Yes. Your behavior to me tonight has made me reconsider my quixotic effort to shield you; from now on I shall strive to clear myself of your lying testimony against me."

"You leave me but one alternative . . ."

"And that is——?" as Janet paused.

"To have the servants put you out of the house."

"Janet!" Marjorie gazed at the young girl in stupefaction, and the latter's eyes wavered and fell as she caught the keen reproach and pain which Marjorie's face betrayed. For a second she battled with her better self.

"I will give you just three minutes to leave this room and house of your own accord," she said clearly. "At the end of that time I shall ring for the servants." And she picked up the hammer belonging to the beautiful Chinese gong which her mother used to summon her maid.

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In the stillness the ticking of the clock on the desk was plainly audible. Slowly, very slowly Marjorie rose and walked with deliberation over to the door opening on the private staircase which led to Mrs. Fordyce's suite of rooms on the floor above. Janet followed her movements with distended eyes; then the chamois-covered hammer in her hand rose and fell, stroke on stroke, until the room vibrated with the mellow tones of the Chinese gong.

Out in the wide hall a man, partly concealed by the heavy portières, jumped nervously back from the keyhole of the door as the sound of the gong reached him, and turning, scudded down the hall just as Dr. Paul Potter came down the broad winding staircase. The latter paused as the clear bell-like vibrations of the gong drifted to his ears, bringing with them a note of urgency and appeal which he was quick to answer.

Locating the sound, he made for the Chinese room and rapped sharply on the panels of the closed door. He waited an appreciable instant, then, receiving no response, turned the knob and walked into the room. As he crossed the threshold his foot struck a small object and sent it spinning ahead of him. His eyes followed the bright silver, and he was about to advance and pick up the pencil when, looking up, he spied Janet sitting in front of the desk. Her attitude arrested his attention. Crossing the intervening space at a bound, he felt her pulse and heart; then stepped back, and his keen gaze swept the room. Convinced that they were alone, he again

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bent over her and laid his hand lightly on her bare neck.

"Feeling better?" he inquired some moments later.

"Yes," Janet shivered and pulled her scarf up about her shoulders. "The incense here always makes me feel deadly faint. I don't see how mother stands it."

"It is trying; suppose I open the window," moving toward it.

"Please don't," she shivered again. "I am quite cold enough already. I would like a glass of water," pointing to a carafe and tumblers standing on a small table near the window. Potter quickly got it for her and watched the warm color return gradually into her pale cheeks. "That tastes so good. You kept me waiting an awfully long time, Doctor."

"I am sorry; your father and I were reminiscing. I thought Duncan was here with you."

"Duncan here?" He wondered at the alarm in her tone. "No, he hasn't been near me. How is mother?"

"Very much improved."

"I am so glad," in a relieved voice. "I felt such a pig to have the dinner tonight, but mother positively refused to let me call it off. Father said it was better to humor her."

"He's quite right; your mother must not be excited by discussions or dissensions."

"We never have them," she laughed saucily. "We are a united family ruled by mother."

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"I have a great regard for Mrs. Fordyce," replied Potter gravely, not liking her flippant tone.

"Have you just come from her room?"

"No, your father and I were talking in the *boudoir*."

"Did you see——" a knock on the hall door interrupted her. "Come in."

"Miss Swann is in the drawing-room, Miss Janet," announced the footman.

"Gracious! I must run," Janet gathered up her scarf, fan, and handkerchief. "If you see Duncan, Doctor, please ask him to hurry," and she departed.

As the door closed behind her Potter walked over and picked up the silver pencil. He was still examining it when Duncan entered the room.

"Where's Janet?" he demanded.

"Gone into the drawing-room," Potter slipped the silver pencil inside his white waistcoat pocket. "Whom do the initials 'J. C. C.' stand for?"

"'J. C. C.,'" echoed Duncan reflectively. "Let me see. Oh, I guess J. Calhoun-Cooper."

"A friend of yours?"

"An acquaintance," shortly. "His sister was at Madame Yvonett's this afternoon."

"Oh!" Potter's fingers sought the lobe of his right ear. "I believe you said they were dining here tonight."

"Yes. I asked Janet to recall their invitations, but she refused to do so."

"Quite right; unless you wish to declare war on them."

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"I'm willing to do it," Duncan scowled savagely. "The way Pauline dared to address Madame Yvonett made my blood boil. Janet promised to see that I did not sit next to her. Joe, Pauline's brother, made a mistake in the dinner hour and arrived here some time ago; he sent word to me by Henderson not to hurry, he'd wait in the billiard-room. The poor fool must be tired of knocking the balls about by himself."

Potter looked irresolutely at Duncan, but before he could make up his mind to a definite course, the telephone bell in the library across the hall rang insistently, and with a hasty word of excuse Duncan dashed to answer it. Picking up the evening paper from the chair where Janet had dropped it, Potter read it hurriedly while awaiting Duncan's return.

"Come on in the drawing-room, Paul," called the latter from the doorway a few minutes later. "Janet has sent a hurry call for us," and as he joined him the physician saw the butler's broad back disappearing in the distance.

"Any news from Madame Yvonett?" he asked, as they started for the ballroom.

"Miss Graves has just telephoned no word has been received from Marjorie," Duncan looked as anxious as he felt. "I wish to heaven she was here."

"So do I; not only on your account, Duncan, but to settle one point once for all," the physician paused doubtfully.

"What are you driving at?" growled Duncan.

"Your father has just told me that he has pur-

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chased the famous Maharajah ruby, and now has it in his possession. . . ."

"Yes, he bought it to give to mother on their wedding anniversary tomorrow; goodness knows why she hates ostentatious display in jewels as in everything else."

"Has your father spoken of his intention to buy the ruby?"

"No."

"Um!" A dry smile twisted Potter's lips. "The jeweler who conducted the sale must have talked. The evening paper gives a full account of your father's valuable purchase, and a description of the ruby. Now, if only Miss Langdon were here we would soon find out how disinterested are her thieving propensities."

"I have a great mind to punch your head!" said Duncan furiously. "Heaven only knows where the poor girl is tonight; and you stand there and dare insinuate—— Oh, come into the drawing-room and meet——" his voice died in his throat.

Standing receiving the guests, looking extremely beautiful in her low-cut evening dress, was Marjorie Langdon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

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MARJORIE saw them at the same instant and for a second faltered, then stepped quietly forward to meet them.

"Good evening," she said. "Janet, here are the truants. I think you are to take me out to dinner, Dr. Potter," and the hand she placed on the physician's arm was steady.

Duncan, collecting his scattered wits, offered his arm to the pretty girl Janet had assigned to him, and followed the others out to the dining-room. Judging from appearances his father and Janet had accepted Marjorie's return without audible comment. Janet, confused by the rapid trend of events, had quickly decided to let well enough alone. She feared to precipitate a disastrous scene if she asked Marjorie to withdraw. Her father, a complete man of the world, had quickly made up his mind to accept the situation, and postponed questioning Marjorie as to her disappearance and return until after the dinner was over.

Inwardly cursing his luck that he was not seated next to Marjorie so that he could question her and tell her of his discovery as to how the Lawrence

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codicil was lost, Duncan took the chair next his companion with an ill grace. There was some confusion in seating the guests, owing to Janet's having changed her father's accustomed seat at the end to one side of the long table. Paul Potter seized the opportunity to draw his host to one side.

"Has Janet had any return of——" he lowered his voice discreetly—"of the old trouble about which you consulted me when she was at boarding-school?"

Fordyce started. "Not to my knowledge," he whispered. "What do you . . ." But Potter had slipped into his chair between Janet and Marjorie, and cogitating deeply, Fordyce made his way to his own place.

Leisurely unfolding his napkin, Potter looked with interest about the table.

"Take pity on a stranger, Miss Langdon, and tell me the names of my fellow guests," he said. "I came into the drawing-room too late to meet them."

"Captain Nichols is on Janet's right; next to him is Miss Pauline Calhoun-Cooper; the girl on Mr. Calderon Fordyce's right is Miss Swann, of Baltimore. Isn't she pretty?" added Marjorie. "The others are Miss Marsh, Miss Dodge, and my neighbor here, Mr. Calhoun-Cooper," indicating Joe with a motion of her hand.

"You have skipped the man sitting opposite you," prompted Potter. The table, a recent purchase of Mr. Fordyce's who never tired of haunting antique shops, was wide enough to permit two seats being placed side by side at either end, and as Marjorie's eyes

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traveled down the long expanse of damask and its load of silver and glass she encountered Barnard's fixed stare. She acknowledged his low bow with a slight inclination of her head, and turned again to Potter.

"Chichester Barnard," she said briefly. "Have you met Mr. Calhoun-Cooper, Dr. Potter," she added as Joe, catching his name, wheeled toward her and through several courses the two men talked with her.

Janet absorbed Tom Nichols' attention to the exclusion of others, and Pauline Calhoun-Cooper, who also had much to occupy her thoughts, gave up trying to make conversation with Mr. Calderon Fordyce and sat back in her chair and watched Marjorie. She had heard through Janet of Marjorie's departure that morning, and Madame Yvonné's statement that her niece had not returned home had convinced Pauline that, as she vulgarly put it, Marjorie had made a "quick get-away." She was at a loss to understand why the Fordyces championed Marjorie's cause. That they did so, she never doubted; Marjorie's very presence indicated that fact. On discovering Marjorie in the drawing-room, Pauline, considering it a personal affront that a girl whom she charged with being an ordinary thief should be an honored guest under the same roof with her, had confided to Joe that she was leaving immediately and he was to accompany her. But Joe, for once obdurate to his sister's commands and entreaties, roughly refused to budge, and inwardly furious, she had made the best of the awkward situation and remained also. With exemplary patience she bided her time.

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Janet's feverishly gay chatter gave Tom Nichols little opportunity to broach a serious topic. He was deeply puzzled and perturbed over the loss and return of the bracelet to the Calhoun-Coopers, and the theft of Mrs. Calhoun-Cooper's pearl necklace had added to his bewilderment. He had spent the past twenty-four hours trying to unravel the mystery. While Janet had not said in so many words, that the bracelet was hers, her manner had clearly indicated that fact. Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper claimed the bracelet as his, and it had been returned to him. Janet's special delivery note hinted broadly that Marjorie had received the bracelet after he left it at her house. And yet how did Marjorie know Janet was wearing a bracelet which belonged to J. Calhoun-Cooper, and why did she return it anonymously to the Representative without first mentioning her intentions to Janet? Tom shrank from the answer which reason dictated.

"Why so solemn?" challenged Janet, not getting an immediate answer to her former question. All through the dinner she had carefully refrained from glancing in Barnard's direction. Under the stimulus of Tom's presence, she had cast prudence to the winds.

"Solemn? Far from it; a nonsense rhyme is bothering me to death. I wonder if you can tell me where it came from," and he quoted hurriedly:

"I gave her one, they gave him two
You gave us three or more.
They all returned from him to you
Though they were mine before.'"

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"Alice In Wonderland!" Janet clapped her hands and laughed in open amusement. "To think of an artillery officer being 'up' in nursery rhymes."

"So that's where the lines are from! My niece and nephew are responsible for my knowledge of Lewis Carroll's masterpiece."

"Do you remember the next verse?" asked Janet. "It goes:

"If I or she should chance to be
Involved in this affair,
I trust to you to set me free
Exactly as we were.'"

Tom had a retentive memory. Was Janet intentionally misquoting? Did she mean him to take the nonsense rhyme seriously? He glanced sharply at her, but her head was partly turned as she helped herself to the *vol-au-vent*. He waited for her full attention before answering.

"It sounds like the unutterable tread of unsearchable circumstances," he said.

It was Janet's turn to be mystified. "I don't at all understand what you mean," she admitted plaintively, wrinkling her pretty forehead in wonder. "I don't even know you are really my friend. . . ."

"Janet, don't for a moment doubt me," Tom lowered his voice so that it reached her ear alone. "I am yours, heart and soul."

Her eyes fell before his, unable to bear the worship which kindled his plain features almost into beauty, and the carmine mounted her cheeks.

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"You'll never believe anything people may say against me?" she pleaded.

"Never," with reassuring vehemence.

"Will you promise to stand by me——?"

"Always; through thick and thin."

"Then, Tom, save me from myself," and a little cold hand slipped into his under cover of the table.

Tom was white under his tan. He was in deadly earnest, but was Janet equally so? His clasp tightened on her hand until her ring cut into the tender flesh.

"Tell me, Janet," and the very repression of his voice showed the tension he was laboring under.

"Is there a chance for me?"

"You are very blind, dear," and the love-light in her eyes was unmistakable.

Paul Potter scanned Janet and Tom quizzically for a second, then turned back to Marjorie.

"It's no use," he said. "I've tried repeatedly to break into their conversation; but it's a close corporation. Behold, you still have me on your hands."

"That is no hardship but good fortune," Marjorie spoke with truthfulness. Joe was not particularly interesting at any time; and feeling as she did that night, anything which interrupted a tête-à-tête with a member of the Calhoun-Cooper family was in the nature of a relief. She had held a three-cornered conversation with Potter and Joe most of the evening, and Joe, usually unobserving, had not failed to note the physician's intent gaze and finally turning restive under the ceaseless espionage, was

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glad to present his back to his right-hand neighbors and talk to his dinner partner, Miss Dodge.

"Tell me more of your adventures when you accompanied Duncan Fordyce to China, Doctor." continued Marjorie, after a short pause.

"I'm afraid I've already related all the exciting incidents of our trip. If you want thrilling romance ask Mr. Fordyce to tell you the story of the Maharah's ruby which he intends giving to his wife on their wedding anniversary tomorrow. Has he already shown it to you?"

"No."

"That's so, he only purchased the ruby today. I believe I'm letting out state secrets," Potter laughed ruefully. "Don't betray me, even to Janet."

"I promise not to, but . . ."

"Are you and Marjorie speaking of the ruby?" questioned Janet. Pauline had finally interrupted her conversation with Tom by claiming the latter's undivided attention, and Janet had overheard Potter's remarks. "That's no secret, Doctor; it is in the evening papers. I teased father to show it to me just before you came in"—Marjorie's heart sank like lead with forebodings of more trouble. "It's the most beautiful stone I've ever seen," went on Janet enthusiastically. "A real pigeon-blood ruby. I could hardly put it down."

Marjorie lost Potter's reply; her attention being centered on Perkins. The butler was bending over and speaking confidentially to Mr. Calderon Fordyce. As the whispered colloquy progressed

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Calderon Fordyce's face grew set and stern. With a quiet word of apology to the two girls sitting on either side of him, he pushed back his chair and left the room.

"Do you suppose Mrs. Fordyce is worse, Doctor?" questioned Marjorie.

Potter looked troubled as he beckoned to Perkins. "Does Mr. Fordyce wish me to go to his wife?" he inquired, as the butler stopped behind him.

"No, sir. Mr. Fordyce has gone to answer a telephone message, sir. Champagne, Miss Langdon?" and before she could stop him, he had re-filled her glass.

"Have you seen Mrs. Fordyce, Doctor?" asked Marjorie, as Perkins passed on.

"Yes, just before dinner. She seemed immensely improved."

"Do you think I could see her later?" She tried hard to suppress all anxious longing, but it crept into her voice, and Potter examined her white face with keen intentness.

"I don't think it would be wise," and Marjorie's sensitive nerves quivered under the peculiar intonation of his voice. Were they all in league to keep her from confiding her troubles to Mrs. Fordyce, her one friend?

To Duncan Fordyce the dinner was interminable. Fortunately the very young girls who had fallen to his share were so taken up with talking of their affairs that his part in the conversation sank to monosyllables, to his great relief. He was not in the mood

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to make small talk. His father had motioned to him to keep his seat when he rose on receiving Perkins' message, and much against his will he had done so. He did not like his father's expression; it betokened bad news. His thoughts instantly sped to his mother, but Perkins' hurried whisper relieved that anxiety, and he was just starting to enjoy his untasted salad when, happening to look down the table, he caught Marjorie's eyes. Their expression of dumb despair stirred him out of himself.

His impulse was to go to her at once, but cooler counsel prevailed. Such a course would instantly draw attention to Marjorie; he would not mind, but she might seriously resent being made conspicuous. With inward fervor he consigned the cook who invented long menus to a warm climate; the table had to be cleared and the ices served before he would be free to go to Marjorie. He glanced at his neighbors: Miss Marsh was holding an animated three-cornered conversation with Chichester Barnard and Miss Swann, and Miss Dodge, on his left, was deeply engrossed with Joe Calhoun-Cooper. He was the only person at the table not busily talking. Taking up his place card and drawing out a gold pencil, he wrote a few lines under cover of the table, and beckoning to Perkins, slipped the card inside his hand with a whispered direction.

A second later Marjorie's elbow was gently jogged by Perkins and a card was placed in her lap unseen by her neighbors. Surprised and somewhat alarmed, she waited until Potter and Janet were engaged in a

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warm argument; then glanced down, and under the shelter of her napkin read the few words written in Duncan's distinctive writing on the back of his place card:

MARJORIE:

I love you. Will you marry me? Answer yes, by raising your champagne glass.

DUNCAN.

Janet turned back again to Tom, and Potter, left to himself, addressed several remarks to Marjorie. Not getting any reply, he looked at her in surprise and discovered her eye-lashes were wet with tears. Before he could think of anything to say or do, she glanced up, her face transfigured.

"W—what did you say?" she stammered. Her eyes, alight with new-born happiness and hope traveled past Potter to Duncan. A moment's hesitation; then she raised her champagne glass to him, and Duncan's blood coursed hotly through his veins as he pledged her in tender silence across the table. "I did not catch what you said, Dr. Potter," she added softly, her eyes never leaving Duncan's radiant face.

CHAPTER XXV.

PHANTOMS OF THE NIGHT

KATHRYN ALLEN, taking care that her starched white nurse's uniform made no crinkling sound, bent over Mrs. Fordyce and listened to her regular breathing. Satisfied that her patient was at last asleep, she arranged the night-light, placed several bottles and glasses on the bed-stand, and left the room. Her rubber-soled shoes made no sound, and she passed through the empty rooms and halls in ghostly silence. First, she paid a lengthy visit to Marjorie's old room, and when she emerged into the hall her white gown was covered by a dark coat-sweater which Mrs. Fordyce had given to Marjorie at Christmas, and the becoming white nurse's cap nestled in one of the pockets of the sweater. Finally, reaching the drawing-room floor, she paused to listen to the distant hum of voices and gay laughter coming faintly from the dining-room, then she peeped into the ballroom. It was empty, and the drawing-room likewise.

Convinced that the way was clear she entered the library and was about to make herself comfortable in Mr. Fordyce's own easy-chair, when the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps startled her, and she

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darted behind the long silken window curtains which effectually concealed her from view.

The curtains had barely fallen back into place when the hall door opened and Calderon Fordyce came in and walked over to the telephone. He was in much too great a hurry to observe his surroundings closely, and becoming absorbed in his conversation over the wire, never heard the faint rustle of the curtains as Kathryn Allen peered out between them into the room, drinking in every word she could overhear. She jerked her head out of sight as Fordyce hung up the receiver.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he exclaimed aloud. "I don't want any more scenes; where in thunder did Janet put the evening paper?" But his search was unavailing, and he left the library still grumbling.

Kathryn allowed several minutes to elapse before she stirred from behind the curtains. Finally convinced that Calderon Fordyce was not likely to return at once, she went directly to his desk, and selecting pen and paper, scribbled rapidly:

DEAR JOE,

They know, and have telephoned Calderon Fordyce. Get a taxi and wait for me around the corner. Don't fail.

K. A.

She reread what she had written, then drawing out a folded paper from the same pocket which contained her nurse's cap, she picked out a long envelope stamped with Calderon Fordyce's house address, and wrote above it Marjorie Langdon's name; then

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straightening out the folded paper, enclosed it in the envelope which she sealed and addressed, and making free with Calderon Fordyce's stamp-book, soon had it ready for the mail.

"I think my 'find' will square accounts with both Marjorie Langdon and Chichester Barnard," she murmured, with malicious fury. "He won't marry me, and he shan't marry her. God! how I—I—love him"—and the unhappy woman bowed her head in anguish. The fact that her habit of self-deception had magnified Barnard's attentions to her did not soften the realization that he cared nothing for her. It was but another version of the moth and the flame, and pretty Kathryn, her wings singed, turned with sore heart to Joe as her haven of refuge. But even so she could neither forgive Barnard nor forget him.

Replacing the envelope in her pocket, she rearranged the displaced desk ornaments, and picking up the note addressed to Joe, left the room. No one saw her make her way into the men's cloakroom on the ground floor, but once there she stuck Joe's note on the mantel in plain view and sped into the hall. Not wishing to encounter any servant she entered the lift and shot up to the drawing-room floor. She made certain the way was clear before venturing down the hall to the Chinese room. Mrs. Fordyce had sent her there earlier in the evening to get the *Evening Star*, and she had used the private staircase to go and return. It would be the quickest way to reach her patient undetected.

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But the contents of the Chinese room fascinated her, and she lingered on, examining with growing interest the many beautiful curios. So absorbed was she that she never heard the opening and closing of the hall door.

"Oh, ho, Kathryn!" said a well-known voice, and with a stifled cry she faced about.

"Chichester!"

Barnard laughed softly as he observed her confusion. "Pretty, pretty, Kathryn!" he mocked. "Why so far from your patient, my dear?"

"What business is that of yours?"

"My general interest in your welfare prompts the question."

"Rot!" bitterly. "You have already shown me that you care nothing for me."

"Interest does not necessarily mean affection, my dear Kathryn. You are so emotional you confuse the terms."

"I don't want your interest," she replied sullenly, her resentment rising.

"Oh, yes, you do," with a provoking smile. "Suppose I lost interest in you and reported your neglect of Mrs. Fordyce to her husband. Is your reputation as a reliable nurse of no value to you?"

"Not particularly."

"Indeed. Found a bonanza?"

"No; a man who respects me."

Barnard laughed again. "Poor fool!"

Kathryn's cheeks turned as red as her hair as her smoldering wrath kindled under his look and words.

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"You are the pitiful fool; wasting your love on a girl who betrays you," she snapped, and meeting his blank stare, added: "Marjorie Langdon has other intentions since being thrown with Duncan Fordyce. You don't believe me? Well, I have proof she's off with the old love. I found out tonight that she plans to ruin you."

"Bosh!" but Barnard paled. "I am in no woman's power. . . ."

"Then why should Marjorie Langdon write to Admiral Lawrence?" she supplemented.

"Why shouldn't she?" he countered.

"Put it down to a change of heart," she taunted. "Perhaps Marjorie wants her old secretaryship back again, perhaps conscience prompts her to make restitution. The envelope was long, it could easily have held a legal document . . . for instance, a codicil to a will."

"Where did you make this interesting discovery?"

"Among Marjorie's belongings."

"While playing hide-and-seek," he jeered. "Well, did you leave it there?"

"For you to steal?" The sneer cost her dearly, for Barnard's quick wits grasped the situation.

"No, of course you didn't; an unscrupulous woman would not leave capital behind. Give it to me."

"I haven't it"—but Barnard, paying no attention to the denial, sprang toward her. "Stop, you hurt my arm"—struggling in his grasp. "You brute!"

"Give me the letter!" Barnard shook her violently. For answer she sank her teeth in his hand. "You

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devil!" he gasped, and she reeled backward under his blow. As her weight fell on the unlatched door leading to the private staircase, it opened and precipitated her into the short passage way. In an instant Barnard was by the fallen woman's side, but before he could search her for the letter he supposed she had, Janet Fordyce stepped into the Chinese room. The passage way was fortunately dark, and she did not observe Barnard kneeling by Kathryn. With a swift movement Barnard pushed the door to, leaving however, a crack through which he could peer into the Chinese room.

Humming a gay tune Janet paused by the electric droplight, then sitting down before the desk she opened the left-hand drawer and putting in her hand felt about until her fingers found a spring which she pressed. Instantly the panel between the two drawers, which usually looked as solid as the rest of the desk, flew out, and Janet, bending down slipped her hand inside the opening and pulled out a jewel-box. With leisurely movement she opened the case and held it directly under the lamp, and the light fell on a superb ruby set as a pendant. She gazed at it admiringly and taking the jewel out of the case carefully inspected the exquisite workmanship of the pendant. She fondled the jewel for a moment, then replaced it in its case, and laid the latter back in the secret drawer. But before closing the drawer she evidently thought better of it and again lifted out the ruby pendant, replaced the empty case, closed the drawer, and unhurriedly left the room.

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Through the crack of the door Barnard, with eyes almost starting from his head, watched Janet's every movement; so intent was he that he failed to notice Kathryn. Taking advantage of his absorption, she had risen to her knees and was also peering into the Chinese room. As Janet disappeared, she sprang to her feet, intending to run upstairs, but Barnard pulled her back and stared at her in horror. She was shaking with noiseless mirth which threatened to break out into hysterical weeping.

"The girl's a thief, a common thief," she gasped faintly. "Trust you to find it out, and use your knowledge to bend her to your will. Well, you may make her your wife, but she loves Tom Nichols." She blanched before his furious expression. "I tell you, Janet Fordyce loves Tom Nichols," she repeated stubbornly. "I've just read the young fool's diary."

"Your inordinate curiosity will be your ruin," said Barnard, with ominous quietness. "Give me the paper you found in Marjorie Langdon's room," folding his handkerchief around his bruised hand.

"Hush!" A murmur of voices sounded down the hall, and Kathryn seized on the interruption. "Go in there," she directed, "unless you wish to be caught out here with me." Barnard hesitated; the voices were most certainly drawing nearer; it would be one thing to be found waiting in the Chinese room alone, and quite a different matter to be discovered apparently hiding in a back passage with a trained nurse. He dared not risk another struggle with

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Kathryn, they most certainly would be overheard. With a muttered oath he laid his hand on the door knob.

"You send that paper to Admiral Lawrence at your own peril," he whispered. "I know of certain escapades which will forfeit any man's respect for you—you understand. Don't push me too far," and jerking open the door he stepped back into the Chinese room.

He had been there but a moment when Calderon Fordyce entered with Representative J. Calhoun-Cooper. With a hasty word of greeting to the latter, Barnard backed toward the hall door, eager to be gone.

"Stop a second, Barnard," exclaimed Calhoun-Cooper. "I am glad to have you here. Perhaps you can help me in a legal way."

"Anything I can do, sir," Barnard was careful to remain in the shadow as much as possible, keeping his bandaged hand in his pocket. "I am entirely at your service."

"Thanks," Calhoun-Cooper turned his attention to his host, to Barnard's relief. "Have you sent for Joe?"

"Yes," replied Fordyce shortly. "Look here, Cooper, can't you contrive to settle this affair without a scene?"

"I'll try. Barnard, here, will help me." Barnard looked wonderingly at the two men. "What is the legal age for marriage in the District, Barnard?"

"With or without the consent of parents?"

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"Without."

Before Barnard could reply, the hall door opened and Pauline stepped into the room.

"What's to pay, father?" she inquired. "I saw you arrive, and overheard the footman tell Joe to come to this room. Is mother ill?"

"No, go back to the drawing-room, Pauline, and hurry Joe in here."

"He won't come." Pauline, scenting excitement, was reluctant to leave.

"Won't he?" Calhoun-Cooper's temper was aroused. Stepping past the others, he jerked open the hall door just in time to see Joe dash by. "Stop him!" he commanded. Tom Nichols, who happened to be returning from the smoking-room, instinctively tripped up the running man, and not until he helped him to his feet, did he recognize Joe.

"Go back into that room," ordered Calhoun-Cooper, and Joe quailed before the look in his eyes. "Come with us, Nichols; no, there's no use trying to run away again," as Joe made a sideways motion to duck by them.

Much astounded Tom followed the father and son into the Chinese room. Janet, getting out of the elevator, saw the little procession, and moved by curiosity, also entered the room. Calderon Fordyce glanced vexedly at the increasing group around him, his request that there should be no scene was not to be granted. Calhoun-Cooper was about to speak when Duncan opened the hall door.

"What do you mean by running off and leaving

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your guests, Janet?" he demanded. "They are saying good-bye, and Marjorie . . ." he stopped abruptly as his eyes fell on the others. "Go back to the drawing-room, dear," and he pushed Janet through the door and closed it behind her.

"Tell me the truth, Joe," commanded Calhoun-Cooper. "Have you taken out a marriage license?"

"Yes," answered Joe sullenly.

"What?" screamed Pauline. "Who are you going to marry?"

"None of your business," retorted her brother.

"It is very much my business," broke in Calhoun-Cooper, who had been holding a hurried conversation with Barnard. "Considering you are not of legal age to marry in the District without your parent's consent."

"We can be married in Rockville," replied Joe heatedly. "I suppose you read the marriage license published in the *Star* tonight."

"Your mother read it after dinner, and at once notified me at the Capitol."

"It's rotten luck!" complained Joe bitterly. "I didn't know they'd publish it. Why should you withhold your consent, father? Kathryn Allen is worthy of respect and love."

"Kathryn Allen!" Pauline's face turned red with mortification and rage. "You propose marrying that girl of questionable repute? You dare to think of bringing her into our family!"

"My family is quite as good as yours," retorted a voice from the other side of the room, and Kathryn

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Allen, who had been an interested listener in the passageway, stepped to Joe's side. She had discarded Marjorie's sweater, and straightened her dress. She looked a model trained nurse in her simple white uniform. For a moment the others were too astounded to speak.

"Are you Kathryn Allen?" asked Calhoun-Cooper.

"Yes," proudly. "And your son has the honor to be engaged to me." She flashed a triumphant look at Pauline whose indignation prevented speech on her part.

"Where have you been most of the evening, nurse?" questioned Calderon Fordyce sternly. "My wife informed me, when I went to see how she was, that you had been absent for over an hour."

"I came downstairs to do an errand for her," lied Kathryn. "Your wife was asleep when I left her."

"I do not like such conduct," said Fordyce curtly. "I have already telephoned to the hospital for another nurse. You may leave at once."

Kathryn's eyes blazed with wrath. "You—you—send me away," she paused to gain control of her trembling voice. "You, whose own daughter is a thief!"

"How dare you?" Both Calderon Fordyce and Duncan moved toward the enraged woman. No one paid the slightest attention to Marjorie and Paul Potter who entered at that moment, and stood regarding the tableau too surprised to speak.

"I am telling the truth," shrieked Kathryn. "Mr.

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Barnard and I both watched her take your ruby pendant."

There was dead silence as all eyes turned to Barnard. Quickly he decided; helped by the promise he read in Kathryn's eyes: she would give him the codicil if he backed up her charge against Janet. Utterly unscrupulous himself, he never doubted that Marjorie, on impulse, had stolen the codicil; his intense egoism making him believe her past friendship for him had prompted the theft. With that codicil once safely in his possession he stood to win one hundred thousand dollars. He could depend on Kathryn's dog-like fidelity if he showed her the slightest affection. Janet? Well, Janet could go in the discard. He cleared his throat nervously.

"The nurse's story is quite true," he acknowledged sorrowfully.

Calderon Fordyce staggered into the nearest chair, and Duncan paused irresolute, as remembrances crowded upon him.

"We saw Miss Fordyce go over to that desk, press a spring, open the middle part, and take out the case," went on Kathryn vindictively, after casting a grateful look on Barnard. He had not failed her. "She removed the ruby pendant, replaced the case, and left the room."

"It's all a rotten lie!" gasped Tom. "It must be," turning appealingly to Marjorie. But she stood silent. She had done her loyal best, she could do no more. The inevitable had happened.

"Did you tell your daughter that you had the

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pendant, Fordyce?" asked Calhoun-Cooper, forgetting for the moment Joe's prospective matrimonial plans.

"Yes, I showed it to her."

"Anyone who reads the *Star* knew father had the ruby," said Duncan slowly.

"But no outsider knew where your father kept the jewel," interrupted Kathryn.

"Suppose you look and see if it is gone," suggested Duncan, and Calderon Fordyce rose and opened the secret drawer. A groan of horror escaped him on seeing the empty case.

"Janet saw me place the case in there," he gasped. "Her mother uses the secret drawer for many private documents and sometimes for her jewelry. Janet, my own dear daughter, a thief!" His agony was unconcealed.

"Do not condemn Janet so soon," said Paul Potter quietly. "The girl was acting under auto-suggestion."

CHAPTER XXVI

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MARJORIE and the others gazed at the physician in stupefied silence.

"I mean exactly what I said," he went on. "The girl was hypnotized."

"She wasn't asleep," protested Kathryn. "Her eyes were wide open, and her manner was perfectly natural. She knew what she was about."

"That is not surprising or unusual," answered Potter. "In cases of animal magnetism the subject is awake; has returned to what may be called her normal state, is able to reflect, reason, and direct her conduct; and yet under these conditions, she is influenced by the auto-suggestion. The real thief is the person who hypnotized Janet."

"I tell you she was alone in this room," declared Kathryn stubbornly.

"I am not denying it," the physician spoke with quiet force. "At the will of the hypnotist the act of stealing may be accomplished several hours, or even two days after the date of auto-suggestion. Such suggestion can only be realized at the given hour, and cannot be realized until that hour arrives."

"All very fine," scoffed Kathryn. "But if Janet

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Fordyce was a poor girl she would be in jail by now. Do you think you'd put up such a bluff for—Miss Langdon, for instance?"

A light broke on Duncan and he stepped toward Marjorie. "Have you known Janet stole?"

"Yes," she answered huskily. "I feared it was kleptomania. I first saw her take a diamond sunburst from Mrs. Walbridge's dressing-table on Christmas Eve."

"And you never told?" Both voice and gesture showed Duncan's unbounded admiration and love as he addressed Marjorie. "You let others think you the thief!" His look repaid her for the suffering she had endured.

"I watched Janet," she confessed. "And whenever I found anything in her possession which I knew did not belong to her, I returned it to the rightful owner."

"How about my wife's pearl necklace?" broke in Calhoun-Cooper. "Did Miss Fordyce take that also?"

"I fear so," faltered Marjorie. "But I have never seen the necklace in her possession."

"Have you any objection to sending for your daughter, Fordyce, and asking her to return the necklace to me?"

Before Fordyce could reply to Calhoun-Cooper's question, Potter interrupted him.

"It will do little good," he began. "Janet is herself again, and all is forgotten; the crime, the impulse, and the instigator."

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"Do you mean to say we cannot learn the name of the fiend who has used my daughter as a puppet to accomplish his villany?" cried Fordyce unbelievably.

"Not unless we hypnotize Janet anew, when her loss of memory will return. She can then probably tell us the author of the suggestion, the time, the place, and the manner."

"A witness cannot be constrained to undergo hypnotism," put in Pauline, breaking her long silence. "It is against the law."

"And how do you know that?" asked Potter.

"A friend, who attended Janet's boarding-school, told me that a young teacher, who took a number of pupils to see Keller, discovered that Janet was susceptible to hypnotism. The magician used her as a subject in the audience. Afterwards the teacher often demonstrated her power over Janet. Mr. Fordyce found it out"—Calderon Fordyce drinking in every word nodded affirmatively, "and wished to prosecute the teacher, but her lawyer refused to permit Janet to be hypnotized so that she might testify against her."

"And how many people have you told that Janet was a sympathetic subject for hypnotism?" asked Potter. Pauline made no answer. "Your brother, for instance?" she fidgeted uncomfortably, but again refused to answer. "Just before dinner," continued the physician quietly, "I saw a man running down the hall from this room; on coming in here I found Janet in a hypnotic trance. . . ."

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"Did you recognize the man?" questioned Duncan swiftly.

"I did not; but he dropped this in his flight," taking out the silver pencil. "The initials engraved on it are 'J. C. C.'"

"I know nothing about the whole business," protested Joe vehemently. "I thought I heard raised voices in here, and stopped to investigate. . . ."

"Through the keyhole?" with sarcastic significance, and Joe flushed.

"If I was on the other side of the door how did I hypnotize Janet Fordyce?" he asked, avoiding his father's look.

Potter paid no attention to Joe's remark, but continued to address the others. "There is nothing which suggestion cannot accomplish with a sensitive subject. With a suggested act are connected sentiments, emotions, passions, voluntary action, and all the phenomena constituting the psychology of movement. The suggestion which persists during the waking state presents one interesting characteristic; it appears to the subject to be spontaneous."

"Do you mean that Janet was consciously a thief?" exclaimed Fordyce aghast.

Potter evaded a direct reply. "The subject generally supposes it to be a spontaneous act, and sometimes she even invents reasons to explain her conduct," he said. "It is owing to this former fact that it is not necessary for the hypnotist to indicate in what way the crime is to be committed. Hurried on by this irresistible force, the subject feels none of

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the doubts and hesitations of a real criminal, but acts with a tranquility and security which insures the success of the crime."

"Your theory illustrates Spinoza's remark that 'the consciousness of free-will is only ignorance of the cause of our acts'," said Calhoun-Cooper reflectively. "As my son seems to be involved in this affair, I must ask you to examine your daughter; and the sooner the better, for we are losing valuable time."

"Miss Marjorie," began Calderon Fordyce. "Tell me who Janet has been with most frequently since coming to Washington, and who are her confidential friends."

"Miss Langdon comes under that heading better than anyone else," interpolated Pauline, and her spiteful manner made her meaning plain, but Marjorie did not flinch under the attack. She was about to speak when Potter answered for her.

"That is a matter of no moment," he broke in. "If Janet voluntarily alienated her free-will to a magnetizer, though the latter may be only a casual acquaintance, she is at his or her mercy; and by the law of habit and repetition the control of a subject becomes more easy and complete."

"But is not a long interval required in which to hypnotize a person?" asked Pauline doubtfully.

"No. Hypnotic sleep can be produced and terminated in the time it takes a subject to traverse a short passage from door to door, and an auto-suggestion can be made in fifteen seconds and affected in all places and at any hour of the day."

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Fordyce glanced at the physician appalled. "What a frightful power for evil in unscrupulous hands. Surely Janet will be able to tell us who has gained so fearful a hold over her."

Potter shook his head. "A suggestion will destroy all recollection of what occurred during hypnotism. As a rule the process which produced the auto-suggestion leaves no trace of its symptoms, and the subject does not remember the way it was produced, and is altogether ignorant of the original source of the impulse she has received."

"Are we to sit here and do nothing, Paul?" demanded Duncan hotly. The opening of the hall door interrupted him.

"Why are you all staying in here?" asked Janet, from the doorway. "Our other guests have left. . . ." A stricken silence prevailed as she advanced into the room, and she was just becoming aware of their concentrated attention when Potter leaned forward, picked up the chamois-covered hammer and struck the Chinese gong until the vibrations filled the room. Thunderstruck, the others looked at him, but he only saw Janet.

"Janet, where did you put the ruby pendant?" he asked, authoritatively.

A crash broke the tense stillness as a statuette toppled to the floor, but the interruption came too late. Janet was deaf to her surroundings. She was obsessed with but one idea.

"I couldn't find your coat," she pleaded. "I had to bring the pendant direct to you, Chichester."

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Barnard dashed the jewel out of her extended palm and sprang for the door. But he was too late. Tom Nichols, with murder in his heart, was there before him, and he went down under the officer's blow.

"Let me finish him, Duncan," begged Tom, frantically, as the men dragged him off Barnard. "Let me kill the dastardly hound!"

"Control yourself, Nichols," commanded Potter sternly. "Think of Janet."

The admonition had the desired effect, and Tom, much against his will, permitted Marjorie to lead him away from the prostrate man.

"Is Janet in a hypnotic trance?" asked Duncan, staring at his sister.

"Yes," replied the physician. "Barnard hypnotized her by means of sensorial excitement. I suspected as much because earlier this evening, I found Janet in a trance in the Chinese room, and before entering that room I heard the sound of a gong."

"She struck the gong herself," gasped Marjorie.

"Unconscious self-hypnotism," commented Potter. "Probably Barnard used musical instruments, or perhaps the regular ticking of a clock to magnetize her so frequently that the law of repetition had its way when she heard the vibrations. I brought her back to her normal condition by placing my hand to the nape of her neck. Tell me," he walked over and planted a hearty kick in the small of Barnard's back. "What means did you use to awaken Janet?"

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"Breathed on her forehead and eyes," mumbled the half-conscious man.

Quickly Potter aroused Janet. She shivered, and turned and stretched out her hands to Tom.

"Take me away," she said. "Oh, Tom, I asked you at dinner to protect me from myself. I'm not well—I tell you, I'm not well," and she shook as with an ague.

Utterly regardless of the others' presence, Tom gathered her in his strong arms. "I shall always guard you, my darling," he promised tenderly. "No one shall come between us, and you will never be tormented again. Come with me."

Barnard staggered to his feet and tried to intercept the lovers. Janet cowered back at his approach.

"Don't let him touch me," she pleaded piteously. "He says I'm a kleptomaniac, and that I must steal, steal——" a shudder of repulsion shook her. "He threatened to tell, he threatened to tell. Am I a kleptomaniac, Tom, dear Tom, am I a kleptomaniac?" Her eyes were alight with horror.

"No, no, my darling; you are only the dearest and best sweetheart in the whole world"—Tom's voice quivered, and he held her close.

"But, Tom, I did find other people's jewelry in my possession sometimes, and how did I get it unless I was a kleptomaniac?" Janet raised both hands to her throbbing temples and burst into a storm of tears.

"Go in the library with Nichols, Janet," broke in Potter. "He will explain away your—nightmare."

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Tom nodded understandingly as he caught the physician's warning glare, and he gently led Janet out of the room. Barnard tried to slide after them, but Duncan pulled him back and closed the hall door.

"State what you have to say to us," he ordered, "and be brief."

"And suppose I refuse to make a statement?" replied Barnard sullenly, nursing his bruised and bleeding face.

"You will have plenty of time to think it over in jail."

"Ah, then you intend to prosecute?"

"Did you doubt it?" Duncan's eyes hardened; it was only by exerting the utmost self-restraint that he kept his hands off Barnard, so great was his fury at the latter's treatment of his sister.

"Have you counted the cost of publicity?" inquired Barnard, with cool effrontery. Some of his habitual composure was returning to him.

"Whatever the cost you shall suffer the full penalty of the law. Father, call up the nearest precinct and tell the sergeant to send here and arrest a thief. . . ."

"And hypnotizer," sneered Barnard, as Calderon Fordyce stepped toward the door.

Joe, who had divided his time looking out of the window and watching his companions, sidled up to Kathryn, who stood next Barnard, and, while pretending to pick up her handkerchief, whispered:

"I found your note. My taxi's waiting outside. You slip out there the first chance you get, and I'll follow."

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She nodded understandingly as her eyes and Barnard's crossed, but Joe did not see their by-play.

"Just a moment," called Barnard, and Calderon Fordyce paused, undecidedly. "I'll not keep you waiting until my trial for an accurate account of my business transactions with your daughter," and he laughed mockingly. "I needed money; always have needed it. Miss Pauline," indicating her with a flippant wave of his hand, "told me Janet was easily hypnotized, and it gave me the idea of compelling her to steal for me. I had her practice by picking up trifles; then came Tom Nichol's coin, then money and jewelry. I netted quite a tidy sum out of our silent partnership. . . ." He stepped back to avoid Duncan's furious leap toward him. Potter promptly stepped between the two men, and in the confusion Kathryn Allen slipped from the room.

"Be quiet, Duncan," commanded Potter. "Finish your statement, Barnard."

"There is very little to add," said the latter, placing the desk carefully between himself and Duncan. "Sometimes Janet passed me the jewelry, sometimes she lost it before she could get it to me. Your wife's necklace was a rich haul"—J. Calhoun-Cooper smiled wryly. "I realized that if Janet was caught stealing, she would only be thought a kleptomaniac. She was tractable enough until I tried to make her turn against Tom Nichols; then she grew stubborn."

"Hypnotic subjects often rebel against injuring those they love," remarked Potter thoughtfully.

"She would have obeyed me in the end," and

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Barnard's dark eyes flamed in sudden baffled rage. "We might have gone on indefinitely, but I grew to hate the influence you, Duncan Fordyce, exerted over Marjorie"—Barnard's manner betrayed genuine emotion. "I planned to get her away from here. Miss Pauline had told me when I accompanied her home from the Charity Ball, that she suspected Marjorie of stealing her mother's pearl necklace, and I suggested that she call here and charge Marjorie with the theft, and also told her to ask Janet what she knew of the theft. She said she would go and see Mrs. Fordyce this morning, so I made an appointment to see Janet before Miss Pauline got here. I saw Janet alone, and by auto-suggestion forced her to testify against Marjorie." A horrified gasp escaped Marjorie, and for the first time he turned and looked fully at her. "I loathed poverty and I loved you," he said, and there was infinite pathos in his charmingly modulated voice. "No other woman counted," he stumbled in his speech, his passion mastering him. "My punishment lies in losing you. Have you no word for me?" stretching out his hands imploringly. But Marjorie bowed her head, unable to speak. Potter, watching her closely, saw she was on the point of collapse.

"Go and call the police, Duncan," he began, then stopped speaking as the room was plunged in darkness.

Barnard, taking his hand from the electric light switch, sprang noiselessly out of the room and raced down the hall, Duncan at his heels. He gained the

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front steps by a narrow margin, and one leap carried him through the open door of the waiting taxi-cab. Duncan stood watching the disappearing rear lights of the taxi-cab with mixed emotions, then turned on his heel and re-entered the house. He met the three older men in the hall, and they accompanied him back to the Chinese room. Joe turned from the open window on their appearance.

"Did Kathryn go with Barnard?" he asked in a voice he strove to make steady.

"Yes," answered Duncan.

J. Calhoun-Cooper stepped forward at the sight of his son's grief-stricken face, and laid an affectionate hand on his shoulder.

"Come home with me, my boy," he said, and his tone gave Joe some ray of comfort. "I need you," and shoulder to shoulder, father and son stepped from the room. Without speaking to the Fordyces, Pauline followed her father and brother out into the hall.

Potter slipped his arm inside Calderon Fordyce's. "Let us see them off the premises," he suggested, and paused only long enough to carefully close the hall door behind them.

Left by themselves Duncan walked swiftly over to Marjorie. He had not seen her alone since his long-distance proposal at the dinner table. At his approach Marjorie faltered and drew back, embarrassment tinging her white cheeks a delicate pink. Desperately she controlled an impulse to turn and fly; then as she met the yearning tenderness of

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his regard she half conquered her shyness and her hand stole toward him in pleading surrender. Intuitive knowledge guided Duncan as he laid his cheek against her soft palm; she had been sorely tried that day, her composure was at the breaking point.

"What have you there?" he asked gently, pointing to a long envelope which Marjorie clutched in one nervous hand.

"I don't know," she steadied her voice with an effort, and handed him the envelope. "My name is written over your house address in the upper left-hand corner, and it is addressed to Admiral Lawrence. I found the envelope in the pocket of my sweater which was lying on the floor behind this door leading to your mother's private staircase. I have no idea how it got there."

"We've had enough mysteries." Duncan thrust an impatient finger under the flap of the envelope and tore it open; then drew out a folded typewritten sheet and glanced hastily over it. "Jove! it's the signed codicil to Mrs. Lawrence's will. I thought I had solved that mystery."

His surprise was reflected in Marjorie's face. "I know nothing about it," she protested hotly. "I did not address this envelope to Admiral Lawrence, nor write my name in the corner . . ."

"But the person who stole the codicil inscribed it for you," exclaimed Duncan triumphantly. "And also made free with your sweater. What else is in the pockets?" thrusting his hand inside them. From

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the last one he pulled out a piece of white linen. "Why, it's a nurse's cap, and the initials 'K. A.' are stamped inside it——" turning the cap over in his hand.

"Kathryn Allen!" exclaimed Marjorie. "She was Mrs. Lawrence's nurse, and was desperately in love with Chichester Barnard. . . ."

"Ah, that is the key to the riddle. She stole the codicil after you left that afternoon; it was lying conveniently to her hand on the desk where Alvord had left it. She undoubtedly hoped that Barnard would marry her and they would inherit Mrs. Lawrence's legacy."

"But why should my name be on this envelope—it looks as if I had sent the codicil back to Admiral Lawrence."

"That is obviously what she intended; probably hoped to involve you in further trouble. Jove! now she's with Barnard, she's probably longing to have this codicil back in her possession," as he spoke, Duncan thrust the codicil inside the secret drawer. "It can rest there for tonight; in the morning I'll take it to the Admiral, and then, good-bye to Chichester Barnard's inheritance. To think of his eloping with a poor woman after all! I believe he knew or suspected she had the codicil—what an awakening for them both when they find she left the codicil here." Duncan shut the drawer, and turned to his silent companion. "Marjorie, have you nothing to say to me?"

Marjorie's eyes fell before his ardent look. "I .

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have so much that I do not know where to begin.
Ah, how can I thank you for your faith . . ."

"It was more than faith, Marjorie, it was the master hand of love."

And as his arms closed around her, she knew, Oh, happy Marjorie, that she had won her woman's paradise at last.

THE END

(1)









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